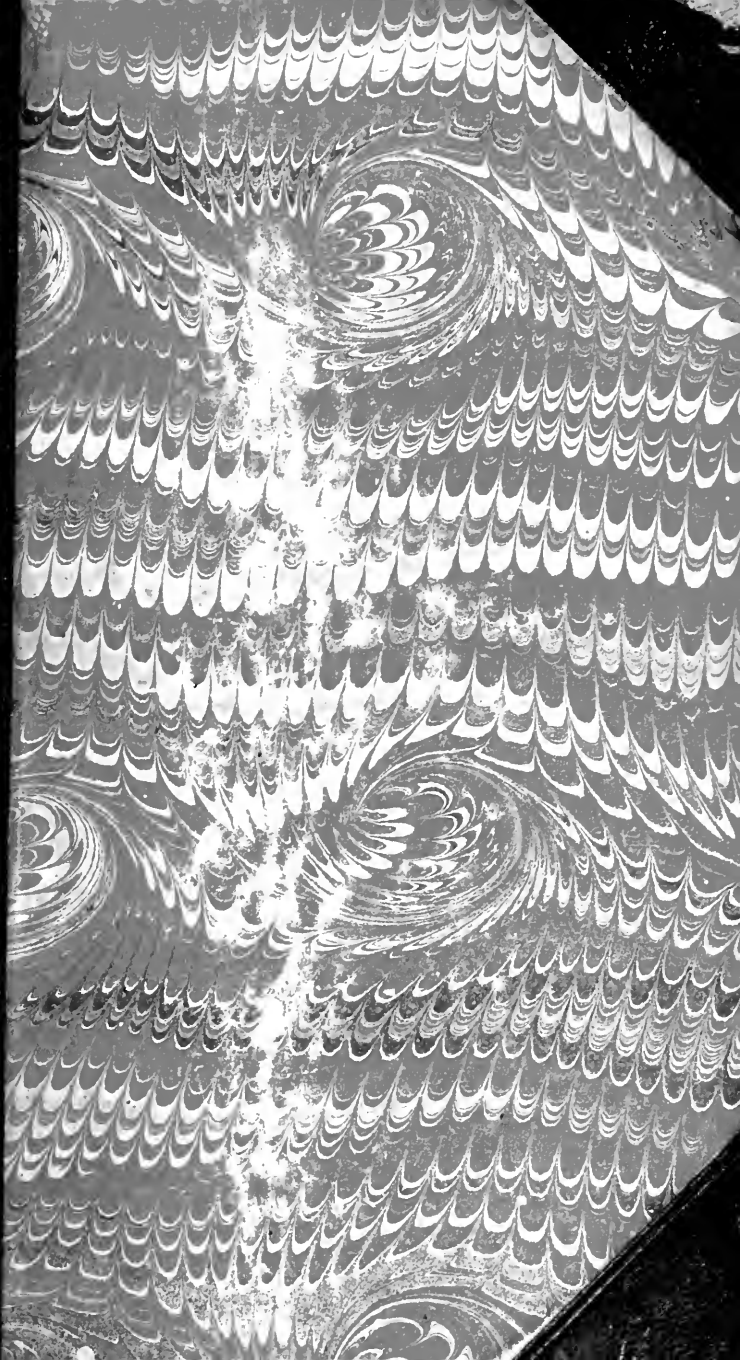
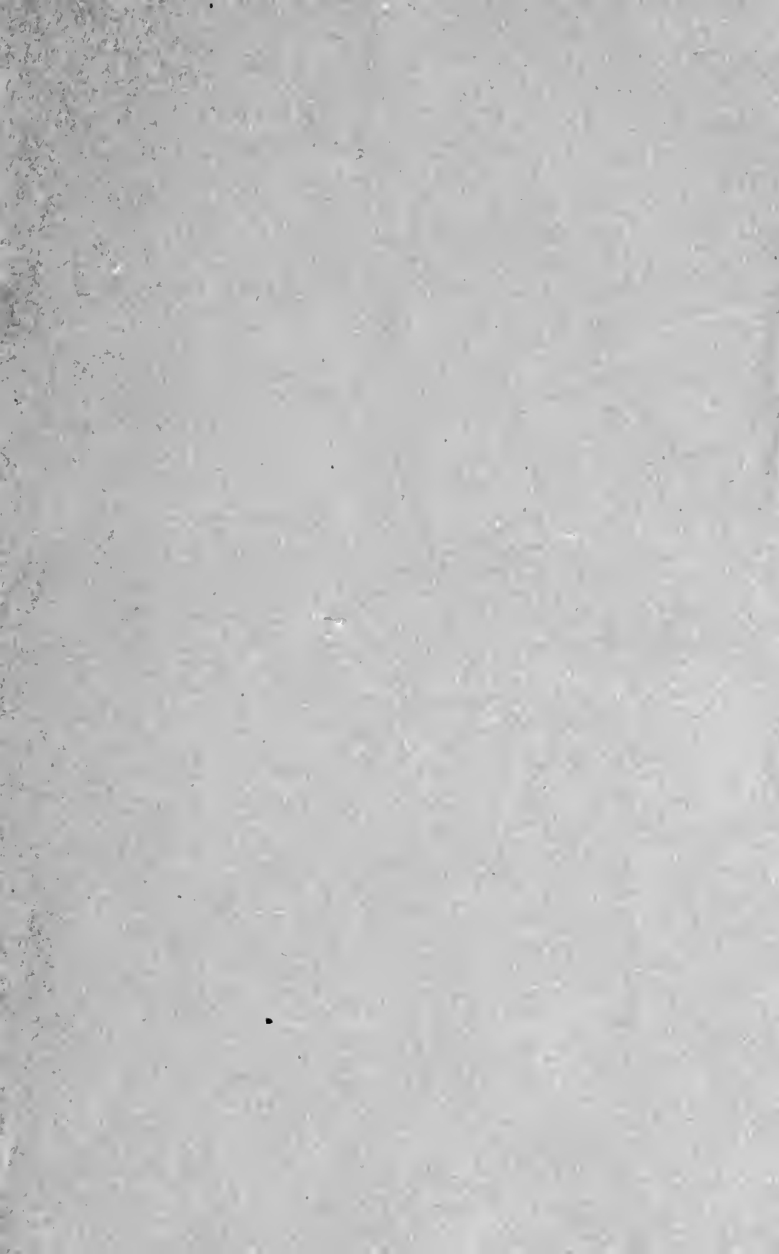


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MAIDENHOOD.

BY

MRS. SARA ANNA MARSH,

AUTHOR OF

"CHRONICLES OF DARTMOOR,"

&c. &c.

"Maidens should be mild and meek,
Swift to hear and slow to speak."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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CHAPTER I.

“HE THAT SHOOTS ALWAYS RIGHT FORFEITS HIS
ARROW.”

MEANWHILE Mr. Maynooth had determined to know more of those beautiful sisters if possible. We left him at breakfast with Yolande, who had just told him “she never had heard the Ladies Stuart mention his name!”

“Of course not,” said he to himself, as he recalled these words and galloped away from Mitreberis. “Of course *the* one I would wish to make care for me will not—at least I suppose not, according to the course of true love; but I confess to much want of experience in these matters. I never tried in my whole life to make a woman love me—I will begin now. If books are copies of real life, as they ought to be, the woman one would wish to attract never is attracted. But as there are men upon this earth, *still living*, who are heartily loved by women, I do not see why *I* need despair! I will not have a faint heart, that I determine beforehand. No,” and he shook his head, as he drew the rein and suffered his horse

to move more gently on. "No, if I loved the queen of England—and she is about the biggest little woman upon earth—if I loved her even, I would move heaven and earth to win her. However, for this morning's work, I will just ride up to the Rectory, and call on Mr. Cheetham, and—and perhaps I shall get a sight of her—that will do to begin with. She is a capital smoker! I never knew any little woman like a pipe so well as she! That is not only *well*, but *very well*."

Mr. Maynooth's meditations were cut short by coming upon a carriage at a turn in the road. The lady, seated alone, was the Lady Irene. Mr. Maynooth greeted her, and then the carriage moved slowly on, he walking his horse by the side, and continuing to converse with the lady.

From her he learned that her cousin Grel had been so much fatigued with the previous day's dissipation as to be still in bed. Lady Irene made herself very agreeable, for she was much pleased with this unexpected meeting with a gentleman who certainly admired her, and with whom she was determined to become better acquainted, and on much closer terms of intimacy. And Mr. Maynooth revelled in her beauty and fascinating manners for the time, and only when they parted did his thoughts return to Grel.

For the distance of a mile or two Mr. Maynooth continued to walk his horse by the Lady Irene's carriage, and they mutually enjoyed this insight into the mind of each other. At length they

reached the entrance-gate of Prellsthorpe, and they parted. Mr. Maynooth rode home. "For," said he to himself, "it is of no use to make a call at the Rectory if I cannot hope to see her." He again communed with himself and his pipe in the evening, but he retired to rest at his customary hour, determining that he would go early to Prellsthorpe Rectory the next day, and make inquiry for the Lady Grel.

And, true to his intention, the next morning Mr. Maynooth rode to within a short distance of one of the gates at Prellsthorpe, and put up his horse at a wayside inn, with an intention of crossing a corner of the Park on foot, and entering the Rectory grounds where they abutted on the Park.

"That she stands smoke so well is a source of much gratification to me, and I must take it for a good omen. I never until now met with a woman who could keep her pretty face impressed on my capacious mind after five minutes of smoke! I declare I admire her the more for her courage, and love her the more for her constancy. A woman ought to be constant, and this woman's courage in standing smoke is greater than that of some men who would have to stand fire. Let me see," and he looked at his watch; "at this hour the day before yesterday I had not seen her—I did not know that there was in this huge world a single darling of a woman who could stand smoke. The wise ones say, 'We live and learn,' I believe

you, my boys ! I have learned something within these last three days that I shall not forget as long as I live. Ah ! I suppose now I shall trample on some of the polite usages of society by calling at this early hour—a quarter to one ! Well, it cannot be helped ; I hate fetters. I shall—what a handsome dog !” said he in a tone of surprise, as a large Newfoundland came bounding along from an angle in the road. The dog stopped, looked well at Mr. Maynooth, and then turning, went hastily back. Mr. Maynooth whistled ; the dog stopped, erected his head and ears, and stared more eagerly than before. Mr. Maynooth whistled again and called to the dog, who now replied by a bark, as he turned and again went away. Mr. Maynooth quickened his pace, for the dog had taken the road that led to the Rectory, and said he to himself, “ that dog has a master, and of course he is gone back to tell him I am poaching on his private road. If the master prove to be that wonderfully disagreeable Lord Danby, I am taken in, for I assuredly did not come so far to see him. If the Rector himself be coming to meet me, I must turn and walk with him, and lose my chance of seeing her. I have heard that on such occasions as these—that is, on seeking to meet one’s lady-love, fate is always hard, and always heaps up numerous obstacles. This seems to me absurd, but I know it is true. Why should happiness be delayed to two most excellent creatures ? However, if I cannot reach the Rectory to-day, I will come

again, and meanwhile watch for her sweet face wherever I go. But this I may say—if she can stand all these interruptions, and still enjoy her smoke, I shall say she is a brick indeed, and I shall honour her the more. Heavens and earth! she herself is coming to meet me! Fate, fate, take my heartiest thanks.”

Now when Grel awoke on this morning she made up her mind that she would no longer succumb to her troubles. It was irksome to lie in bed; it was irksome to spend her days and nights in weeping; it was very irksome to feel herself begirt by difficulties she did not understand, and very irksome, also, to have no particular lady friend capable of advising with her and pointing out how she might escape this thralldom! But Grel felt she was not the only motherless maiden in the world; and others similarly situated managed to get through their troubles with credit to themselves, and she must try and make her way also. But then Grel admitted to herself that others were not plagued with a cousin D.—she had that hardship over and above the burdens consequent on early “Maidenhood.”

“I must go to the Park,” said she to herself, as she completed her morning toilette. “I must go to thank my dear uncle for his kind invitation. Then I shall see Irene and D., and if they are angry with me, as I anticipate, I will sit and bear it—just to try what the result of submission, apparently, to their wishes will be. I will go early

that my uncle may be able to see me, and also to get the matter over. When I have anything disagreeable on my list of duties, I like to do it, and have done with it. I cannot, by any possibility be more unhappy than I am now—or rather than I was before I made the resolution to stand and face my troubles; this has comforted me a little, and on my return home I trust I may bring a lighter heart and a less anxious mind.” And thus it happened—if Mr. Maynooth had spoken he would have said—“It happened that himself and his lady-love were allowed by fate to meet thus opportunely for their own mutual happiness!”

Fate is gracious on some occasions, and this was one.

At some distance down the now narrowing path into the Rectory grounds Mr. Maynooth saw the Lady Grel walking alone at a very deliberate pace, her large dog by her side.

“Hee on, good dog!” said she, “there is that very handsome gentleman, Mr. Maynooth!”

He could not hear her words, but he saw she sent her dog to greet him, for the animal now came bounding joyfully back. The dog did not come near enough to be caressed; he contented himself with a joyous bark, and then returned to the lady.

“Hee on, Bauer! say good morning to Mr. Maynooth,” said Grel.

And now the words were heard by him, and the sound of her voice did not tend to quiet or restrain

the extraordinary gladness and emotion he felt at this very unexpected meeting. He put out his hand and grasped hers, as he muttered something expressive of his delight and satisfaction. Grel started, and put her disengaged hand upon his arm; and though she attempted to turn away her head, he saw its expression change from a smile of welcome to a twinge of pain.

"You hurt me—you hurt me!" said she, almost in a whisper, and writhing.

The fact was, in his joy at seeing her, he had grasped her right hand so heartily, and so unconscious was he of the size and strength of his own hand, compared with the smallness and delicacy of hers—that he had pressed the rings she wore into the flesh! For a few moments she leaned upon him, looking pale and trying to repress any evidence of suffering. He did not comprehend the extent of the evil; hardly did he understand he had pressed her hand too firmly.

"Speak to my dog!" said she, gasping for breath.

And Mr. Maynooth, without knowing why, spoke to the dog, and the dog being a very sensible dog, and seeing how matters stood—that his mistress was in very good hands—frisked along, running here and there, and eventually went out of their way. In a short time Grel recovered sufficiently to find she was leaning upon Mr. Maynooth in an unceremonious and very unusual way, and with an effort she withdrew her hand from his arm

upon which she had leaned, and with many conscious blushes at her self-conviction of this unintentional familiarity with a gentleman to whom she was so little known, Grel began to apologise. For the moment Grel scarcely knew what she said, and certainly Mr. Maynooth did not comprehend her. He saw she had been in pain, and a something in the action of the hand he had liberated, tenderly held by Grel in her left hand, told him he had caused the pain. Fortunately they were near one of the many seats conveniently placed under the shade of trees, and Grel at once availed herself of an opportunity to rest. She sat for a second or two without speaking, trying to make up her mind to the sort of apology she ought to make, so as at once to vindicate herself from any suspicion of wilful familiarity, while she at the same time hid from him the pain she suffered from his thoughtlessness.

“You see—I hope you will excuse me, because—I tried so hard *not* to scream—on account of Bauer.” Bauer was the name of the large dog, but Mr. Maynooth did *not* know this. And then as he did not reply to her stammered out apology, she began again, “Dogs are so faithful and affectionate!” and then, by way of saying something, she added as she turned away from Mr. Maynooth’s very, as it seemed to her, ardent gaze, “at least, Bauer is so.”

Poor Grel! She had gone courageously forth to meet her cousins, and bear the brunt of their

anger, and, long before she reached the Park she met with another cause for trouble to her sensitive mind.

Now Mr. Maynooth had listened to her attempt at an apology from an unconscious pleasure in the sound of her voice. He it not then understand that he had caused her pain. Soon, however, as we have said, by the listlessness of the liberated hand, and the tender care made for it by Grel's left hand, the fact dawned upon him—that *he had been cruel*. This knowledge for the moment deprived him of speech. But he did not also deprive him of eyes. And these expressive organs told the Lady Grel that her heroism excited in him an admiration that was boundless—that she had blamed herself for *his* fault—that *she* had apologised who had done no ill, and that he would die that moment at her feet, if to die would restore her to freedom from pain and give her constant happiness.

Unfortunately, "Maidenhood" misunderstood the language of the eyes. She thought they spoke to her of an admiration that should have been put aside at that time while she sat friendless and alone; and also, she thought they only dared thus ardently to gaze because she had been so very unintentionally familiar.

"He is not sufficiently well bred to be generous," said she to herself as she arose to continue her walk.

This movement broke the spell which had kept

Mr. Maynooth silent and motionless, and he not only spoke, but put out his hand with the intention of detaining her. He intended to tell her that he was covered with shame and confusion at the recollection that *she* had blamed herself for his unpardonable act of thoughtlessness in putting her, though undesignedly, to such excruciating pain.

All this had rapidly passed through his mind as he attempted to prevent her from going away ; but instead of making this apology, which had been called into existence by his judgment, but which his tongue was too much paralyzed to utter, he suddenly burst forth into words expressive of the pent-up feelings that consumed him at that time, and told her "she was the veriest darling," &c. But Grel's cold and proud manner cut his untimely expressions very short. Naturally enough she, with the tender refinement that generally exists in "Maidenhood," felt herself insulted. Poor Grel!—she made a hasty and desperate effort to free herself from his touch, for, as we have said, "he placed his hand upon her arm with an evident wish to detain her," and starting up, was about to set off running at her topmost speed, when, fortunately for her own dignity, her immediate flight was arrested by the sight of no other than Mr. Hamilton coming up the path that led from Prellsthorpe Abbey to the Park. Her movement of recognition to Mr. Hamilton, who was coming briskly on, caressing

her dog, caused Mr. Maynooth to fall back. He saw he had offended Grel, and he was angry with himself. He strongly wished to explain to her before Mr. Hamilton could join them, but this evident intention on his part only made matters worse in Grel's judgment.

"Explain!" she would have said, if she had spoken, "how could he explain away the great and almost unforgivable liberty he had taken with her?"

But Grel did *not* speak; she turned away her face to hide the expression from Mr. Maynooth, as she confessed to herself her own unintentional familiarity with him had given him the *pretext* upon which to take a liberty with her. Grel's ears and cheeks tingled with sensitive shame; and when she had recovered herself a little, she turned and curtsied, and wished Mr. Maynooth a very good morning.

Poor Grel!—her heart swelling almost to the bursting of the slight bands that kept it apparently in check. Her eyes, not only filled with tears, but the tears themselves streamed hurriedly down her cheeks. And yet Grel's step was slow and dignified, though her eyes betrayed her weakness, and her heart was bursting with indignant displeasure. This is a phase of early and sensitive "Maidenhood" that many maidens will understand.

After the ordinary greetings between Mr. Hamilton and Mr. Maynooth, the former followed

Grel to Prellsthorpe Park, and the latter was left standing disconsolately under the very trees that had so lately witnessed his powerful emotion ; and if these trees were endowed with a gift to see into thoughts, or to listen to words, they were cognizant also of the result of his very unintentional speech to the Lady Grel. Mr. Maynooth stood as if spell-bound, watching Mr. Hamilton and Grel out of sight. When he lost sight of them, he started into something like a comprehension of his own position, and then set off to follow them. Soon he came in sight of the house, and as he had no intention of calling there, this again arrested his steps. He stopped to consider what he ought to do, for he felt himself in a disagreeable dilemma, and decided that he ought to call at the Rectory. He returned to the group of trees under which he and Grel had been seated, while he had been absorbed in his own emotions, and understood so little of his actual position, and found that now the case was reversed ; he himself was much more clear-sighted as to his real position, and his "emotions" had taken flight with the Lady Grel.

"I must go to the Rectory—I must see the Rector," murmured he to himself. "Somehow, against my inclination, everything seems to go wrong. Now, I thought fate so propitious to send her to me at that moment."

The pronoun "her" meant the Lady Grel in Mr. Maynooth's thoughts. When he found him-

self really face to face with the Rector, he suddenly spoke of his accidental meeting with the Lady Grel in Prellsthorpe Park, and confessed he had somehow or other hurt her hand. He recounted then, at the Rector's request, the whole scene.

"She told you to talk to her dog," said the Rector, "because she had not strength herself; and remember, if the dog had discovered that you had hurt his mistress, he would have 'worried' you."

"The more I think of her heroism, the more I am dumb with astonishment. And, you see, she must have misunderstood me, because she was highly offended at my humble apology. You must know for some time I could not speak."

The Rector smiled.

"It is true, on my honour," said Mr. Maynooth, solemnly.

"I know it," said the Rector. "I am sure you will not deceive me; your manner is sufficiently convincing," added he, kindly.

"But she quite misunderstood me—I feel fully assured of that; she took me for some impudent fellow, who wanted to stare her out of countenance; she was wrong—I had no such intention."

The Rector laughed aloud.

"Indeed it is too serious to excite laughter," said Mr. Maynooth. "I am not an impudent fellow—quite the contrary. I was ashamed of

myself, and struck dumb with the weight of my own abominable behaviour. Oh ! Mrs. Cheetham, good morning to you," continued he, rising and bowing as Mrs. Cheetham entered the room, "I am selfishly, very selfishly glad to see you."

"I am glad I came in so opportunely," said she.

"I am such a Goth," said Mr. Maynooth, stooping to speak to Mrs. Cheetham, and looking very handsome, very gentlemanly, and very intellectual, and, in short, anything rather than the "Goth" he chose to designate himself—"I am such a Goth, I have been explaining to Mr. Cheetham. I have been rude to a lady—" Mrs. Cheetham looked up in wonder—"oh ! no, I mean cruel," resumed he.

"Cruel ! Mr. Maynooth," said she in tones of surprise.

"I never explain myself well to ladies, or where ladies are concerned," said he. "But will you kindly undertake for me to cure a lady's hand ? Mr. Cheetham thinks you will, and I hope he is right ; for, you see, I am necessarily in much trouble and anxiety, and the worst of it is, I do not know how to help myself, for, in one of my stupid acts of legerdemain, I have pressed the rings worn by a lady into her very flesh."

"Oh ! Mr. Maynooth, that is so painful. It has happened to me once or twice in my life, and I assure you it is very painful for a short time."

"Happened to you, do you say ? Then I say I am glad to hear it, since the pain is over, and no one in trouble on that score at this moment," said

Mr. Maynooth. "You see this confession proves that there are other dolts in the world besides me. And thus I conclude," and he stooped his tall person to Mrs. Cheetham, as he spoke, "you know the proper remedies to apply, and you will kindly and charitably undertake to relieve the pain from which the lady suffers."

"It is a temporary pain," said Mrs. Cheetham with a smile; "but who is the lady?"

The Rector explained, and Mrs. Cheetham promised to do her utmost to restore Grel's hand to its former freedom from pain; and after a short time Mr. Maynooth took leave.

"Faint heart!" said he to himself, after he had mounted his horse. "Many a man would be faint of heart at the contemplation of a position such as mine at this moment. And when Fate began by being so propitious! It was cruel to deceive us so—to let us meet so happily and willingly, to be separated so unwillingly, on my part at least, for so cruel a misunderstanding. It seems that I was a good deal in fault, though I did not mean it; and for that matter I could horsewhip myself for my clumsiness, only that I should not gain anything by my great courage. And also it seems to me that I often do wrong in the right place, and *vice versa*. I defy Almeric Barrymore himself to go beyond that, but I think Raymond Maynooth might be ashamed of it. Women have much to answer for in this world; that lovely Lady Grel is the cause of all my infirmities. Yet

I forgive her, and swear to love her for ever and ever unless she herself prove fractious."

We suppose Mr. Maynooth registered a vow at this moment ; he certainly kissed the silver mounting of his whip, then quickened his pace and rode off home.

CHAPTER II.

"IT IS BETTER TO REPROVE PRIVATELY THAN TO BE ANGRY SECRETLY."

WHEN the Lady Grel turned away from the group of trees and walked on alone, she felt a greater amount of indignation towards Mr. Maynooth than she had ever before experienced towards any one, not even excepting her cousin Danby. She went over the whole scene in her memory, as she unconsciously quickened her pace and tried to get away from this new trouble.

"I never spoke to him in all my life until I met him at Landeswold!" and she could not restrain the hot tears that rolled down her cheeks. "It is true we have met him occasionally, perhaps in the streets of Stowe-in-the-Valley when we have been shopping, but never to speak one single word, and then for him to presume to——" She had walked herself out of breath, and now she stopped to recover, and to wipe away the evidences of her emo-

tion ere she reached the house. The dog came back and stood panting by her side. "Yes, good dog," said she, as she stooped to caress him, and then resumed her walk, "you would soon have made *him* suffer, tall and strong though he is, if I had only incautiously screamed; and to think that because of my presence of mind he should presume to think me——" and again the hot tears rolled down her cheeks. "I should have fallen if I had not caught his arm; the blood even now is all through my glove, and my hand is in pain. But to suspect me of a familiarity of manner that would make a housemaid blush—almost kills me."

At this moment she was joined by Mr. Hamilton, and unsuccessfully attempted to hide the very perceptible signs of her emotion.

Mr. Hamilton, with true refinement of manner, occupied himself for the first few minutes with caressing and talking to the dog; and a natural habit of restraint in the presence of others enabled the Lady Grel to curb these outward indications of her resentment towards Mr. Maynooth and to become more of her natural self. But Mr. Hamilton had seen enough to awake in him a train of thought unfavourable to the lady.

"She was brought to my *fête* by D. weeping. I pitied her then, I thought she had had a declaration of love, and fallen a prey to the arts of her *blasé* cousin, who would not care how much suffering he excited in her so long as he could continue to amuse himself. And now I find her

in the Park seated under the oaks with Maynooth. Seated, too, in the most friendly and confidential manner. I saw them before they saw me. I saw him stoop—stoop down quite close enough to have said very tender things. She sat quiet enough, and listened complacently enough until she saw me, and then with a start of surprise she jumped up to make good her retreat. This she could not do; I had seen her, and by Maynooth's manner he told her this; he certainly sought to detain her—I saw that. But she disagreed with him in opinion, she affected—for after the scene I had witnessed it must have been affectation—she affected to leave him in a stately, almost a haughty manner—and—and I am sorry, very sorry, that one so young should stoop to such unseemly art——”

Enough has been recorded to show the impression made upon Mr. Hamilton; and when he did at length turn and speak to Grel his manner was not gracious.

Now Grel, in trying to bring her thoughts into use for the present moment instead of allowing the past few minutes to continue their torment over her, unhappily remembered her cousin Danby's accusation, “that she had dared to love a gentleman—Mr. Hamilton—before he had declared his love for her.” And the proximity of this very gentleman, for the first time alone with her since she had been tormented by Lord Danby, raised in her a new cause of alarm.

It should be steadily borne in mind that the

greater part of Grel's troubles arise from her own conscience.

She had certainly thought a great deal about Mr. Hamilton, and as we have elsewhere recorded, taken every opportunity of watching him, and afterwards of recording her observations in his favour. But Grel was not prepared to learn that others *knew* she followed Mr. Hamilton with her eyes, and enshrined him in her heart—because she never spoke *of him*, and in these early days only admired him as a handsome and distinguished gentleman, who had the reputation of being very learned, very wealthy, and very charitable to the poor. Grel worshipped these powers of mind and virtues of character before she had seen Mr. Hamilton himself; but having seen him, and having silently watched him, she unwittingly set him up as the type of manhood she most admired.

Conscious of this enshrinement in her own mind, though Grel had not given her heart to Mr. Hamilton, she was unable, truthfully to herself to deny her cousin's accusation, and yet she felt she certainly did not deserve blame. And now, in this morning walk through the Park with Mr. Hamilton by her side, she suddenly seemed to understand—that if her cousin Danby could see so clearly that her thoughts of late had been much occupied with Mr. Hamilton, so also other gentlemen could easily read the same indices—and above all others so also could Mr. Hamilton! This thought covered the sensitive Grel with blushes of shame and regret.

She hardly ventured to raise her eyes to Mr. Hamilton, in the fear that she might read there a strong condemnation of what must appear to him unmaidenly conduct.

Mr. Hamilton's manner was always dignified; on this occasion she could not help shrinking from the sound of his cold and unsympathising tones. "Of course," thought Grel, "he has read my thoughts and despises me, as D. told me he would." She hurried on, but Mr. Hamilton's strides were equal to the retaining of his place by her side; his thoughts meanwhile influenced by her shyness and too evident wish to get away from him, to her own disadvantage.

"I see she is in a state of alarm. Has this, then, been an absolute assignation with Maynooth? It must be so. She looks guilty and dreads exposure. I shall not take the trouble to expose your foolish conduct, you vain and silly girl," thought he, as a powerful expression of contempt spread over his features. At that moment Grel raised her eyes to his, and spoke,

"I see my cousin Irene coming," said she, thinking her companion would be glad to know Irene was so near, and also glad of an excuse to leave her to finish her walk alone.

She spoke, but she turned away her eyes, stung to the quick by the contempt and scorn she saw impressed on Mr. Hamilton's countenance. They walked on in silence; he felt that she had read his opinion, and, as we have before said, having high

ideas of the dignity of manner and purity of conduct in women, he was not sorry that while she was so young she might learn if she pleased, "that forward 'Maidenhood' was not admired by gentlemen."

When they reached the house Grel entered and went to seek her uncle, her heart now loaded with troubles of all kinds; and as she slowly crossed the spacious hall, and ascended the stairs, she felt almost inclined to acknowledge to herself that the annoyance her cousin D. had caused her was much to be preferred to the rude stare and intolerant familiarity of Mr. Maynooth, or to the cold tone and unexpressed contempt of Mr. Hamilton.

"I have only admired him because he is handsome, talented, and good," thought Grel; "I am sure I do *not* love him—indeed, now I am afraid of him. I feel I do not deserve his contempt; he judges me from a wrong point of view. And for that matter so did Mr. Maynooth. I did not mean to be in any way familiar, or to demean myself. And when I think of the stare—the intrusive stare of his great large eyes, I could drop into the earth to cover the sort of shame I feel at his presumption, and yet in another sense I feel as if I could look him *dead* in my own indignation!"

The indignation of "Maidenhood" is often powerfully aroused, but it is seldom vindictive. And in this instance Grel expressed the magnitude of her anger by a figure of speech; but she

was too amiable and too gentle really to wish to commit—murder.

Meanwhile Mr. Hamilton had turned to meet the Lady Irene.

CHAPTER III.

“EXCHANGE IS NO ROBBERY.”

ALMERIC'S restlessness of manner increased after the day that Dr. Quinn dined at Heraldstowe. Many times a day he unlocked his cabinet, took out the coin, and wished he could have it restored to Sir Hildebrand without declaring the share he had had in its disappearance. How “the six-angel piece” had managed to escape from the clutches of Baron Almeric, and hide itself behind the shield of Baron Guy, was a constant puzzle to his thoughts. As he passed through the hall he often stopped and examined again the mailed arm of the knight to see if there were any interstice that could account for this strange escape. But no, he could not see any solution to the difficulty.

Palmer, the butler, who had actually taken the coin from the statue, made his own remarks on Almeric's attention to the Baron Almeric.

“It is my firm conviction,” said he to himself, “that Mr. Barrymore knew there was a coin in the arm of that statue! Very possibly he is vexed

that it has disappeared. And as there has already been so much fuss in the house on this subject, he very naturally objects to speak of his annoyance, or of his suspicion that it has been taken away." And the man stood thoughtfully looking round the hall for a few minutes ; then he resumed his argument.

"To attempt to touch one of these old Barons, I mean remove any one from his present place, without permission, is as much as one's place is worth, and almost equal to the value of one's head," added he with a smile, as he pushed his hand through his hair. "And I could not do it without help ; and yet, if I could get permission to move one or both of those two most magnificent gentlemen," said he, pointing to two standing in that part of the hall where he thought he had seen the coin roll, "I know I should find something. It was not a coin of the present day. It must be one of great value. It was gold I am sure, though I had not time to examine it minutely. If I could find it I would take it to Mr. Barrymore, and tell him how I saw the gauntlet coming off and took the gold coin from the wrist of that old gentleman there," pointing to Baron Almeric ; "but if I cannot find it, I am *not* going to get myself in a scrape, and I will keep my own counsel, and never speak of the escape of the coin to any one. However, I may as well make another attempt to get the coin from behind the shield," and the man went steadily to work, and with much

patience poked first one stick and then another into such places as he could command.

"It is of no use—I must give it up;" but he made another attempt, and then out came the coin. The man seized it eagerly for the purpose of examination, when lo! a florin of the reign of Victoria!

"Hang the Baron!" said he, impatiently dashing the coin on the floor of the hall—"hang him, I say, and all his brethren, for the trouble and worry they have caused me for a paltry florin."

And then he stooped, and picked it up, and rubbing it between his fingers, said,

"This was not the coin I took from the old fellow. It was of gold—I am sure it was gold—and, besides, I think this coin is too thick; it could not hide itself conveniently."

He approached the statue, and tried if it would slip in at the edge of the gauntlet; it would not; the gauntlet fitted rather closely over the rearbrace. The sun's rays fell upon it through the stained glass, and gave it a golden hue.

"Oh!" said he, looking up, "so you deceived me, did you? And this is really the coin I took from the wrist?"

He inserted his finger at the hollow of the arm, between the elbow-piece and the rearbrace.

"Ah! yes—it would go in here, I daresay," said he.

He placed the coin between the armour and the cloth; it entered easily.

"Yes," said he, as he stood musing, "the coin I found must have been at some period or other put in here, and so it gradually worked its way through. I wonder if this can really be the coin?"

He put his finger in at the hollow of the arm, with an intention of drawing it forth; he accidentally pushed it further in. He made a second attempt, but with a like result. Then he desisted for a second or two, stepped back, and stared at the statue, came forwards, tried again to recover the coin, but again failed.

"The house is bewitched, and there must be more than one witch riding her broom over the roof of Heraldstowe. One witch could hardly drop a dozen gloves, unless she was smuggling them from Paris. And perhaps she was, for I daresay witches are just as wicked as—as any other class of persons. But, old lady, you need not smuggle gloves in these days, when everybody goes to Paris. But now for this coin."

Ere he could make another attempt, he heard the sound of wheels approaching, and desisted. He was then compelled to allow the Baron to retain the coin and attend to his own duties. Those duties kept him employed all the remainder of that day and all the next. But he had not forgotten the florin, and determined he would not leave it in Baron Almeric's arm.

But now Almeric had sustained another loss that made him unhappy. In the Park he drew out from his pocket accidentally a small bunch of

keys; the keys were on a chain, the clasp of which closed with a screw. He did not observe that the screw had in his pocket worked round and almost opened; in attempting to replace the bunch, the keys fell to the ground. He picked them up, counted them, and put them loose in his pocket. Soon afterwards he took his purse from the same pocket to prove that he had calculated rightly the money he had spent in Stowe. He did not see that a small key had been caught up in the net-work of the purse. It dropped in the Park. It was the key of his cabinet.

Some hours afterwards, when he wished to open the cabinet, he began to restring the keys on the chain, and missed the valuable one. In much perturbation, he sought everywhere, but no key could he find. He remembered having counted them in the Park, and having found the number right; he could not account for the fact of one being absent now. But now returned upon him in full force the sort of diablerie that had all along followed the path of the "six-angel piece"—of its long incarceration in the arm of the statue, and then of finding it lying hid under the feet of Baron Guy.

"Baron Almeric has had something to do with this key," said he; "and as for ghosts, I am rapidly becoming a devout believer."

He hurried down to the hall as he spoke, walked up to his mediæval ancestor, the Baron Almeric, and pulled the cloth that went through

the rearbrace, as he had formerly done when he knew the "six-angel piece" was there. The very same sound smote upon his astonished ear—the sound of some loose piece of metal rubbing or grating against the metal that composed the arm, or, properly speaking, rearbrace of the armour.

"Yes—I expected this," said he to himself, in a tone of intense satisfaction—"that is the key of my cabinet, and I will not leave this hall until I have recovered it.

He pulled forth a button-hook as he spoke, and holding it up so as to be seen by the Baron—that is, if he had eyes to see—he said,

"I have no inclination to wait an indefinite time until your highness shall have transplanted my key to some other hiding-place—I must have it now."

He inserted the hook as he spoke, and either he had more skill, or the florin was more amiable than the "six-angel piece," for it quickly presented its edge at the elbow-joint, and Almeric drew it forth.

"God of heaven!—what is the matter with me?" said he, in a tone of alarm, and turning pale as he saw the coin instead of the key.

He tried if there were anything more concealed in the arm. Nothing grated against the armour, neither could the button-hook dislodge anything else.

"This, then, is the florin I dropped when I changed my money from my old purse to the new

one Zara gave me? How could it possibly change places with the 'six-angel piece?' Ghosts, I devoutly believe in you. There must be ghosts in Heraldstowe!" And after a few moments, he said: "But my key—the key of my cabinet—have the barons, or the ghosts, or both together, run away with it? I must now get a man to pick the lock of my beautiful cabinet, or somebody or something will carry away the coin that is locked up there. But—" and he stood still, and gazed round the hall for a few seconds before he spoke, and then he added, in low tones, and with a deep sigh,

"It is recorded in the legends of Heraldstowe that 'the Barons have tilting matches in the Park,' and if I am awake at this moment, I should certainly say there is no doubt but that they amuse themselves with the game of 'pitch and toss' in the hall."

If Miss Barrymore and Sir Hildebrand could have known of these mischances to Almeric, they would have had some key to the change in his temper, and to his now almost habitually irritable manner. But Almeric never spoke of these anomalies to any one.

The fact that he could not open his cabinet annoyed him. But he never let an opportunity pass when he was alone, and, as he thought, unobserved, of touching Sir Almeric's arm, and listening for any sound that would betray something hidden there. All was still; he heard no grating noise.

CHAPTER IV.

“COURAGE OUGHT TO HAVE EYES AS WELL AS ARMS.”

MEANWHILE Palmer had been too much occupied to find time to attempt to set the florin at liberty—if it had been a coin of greater value perhaps he would have been more eager in the search. But one night, quite late, when he fancied himself the only person in Heraldstowe who had not retired to rest, he determined to take his tools into the hall, unscrew the elbow-piece from the rerebrace and take off the gauntlet, and thus liberate the florin.

It was between midnight and one in the morning. The man went to work very quietly, and succeeded in taking off the arm of the Baron without ungloving him. Very much astonished was he that he could not find the coin. He placed the arm on the floor by the statue, and took his lamp to examine well the cloth coat that fitted under the arm, and indeed the upper part of the arm as well. While in the act of feeling well over every part he thought he heard some distant sound—perhaps some one approaching.

He took up his tools and put out his light as he said to himself,

“Now, this must be Mr. Barrymore coming to have a parley with his august ancestors in the dead of the night. I must be off.”

For the purpose of ascertaining if he had been right in his conjecture, and that Almerie was then coming into the hall, he went up the grand staircase that he might meet him. All was dark and still. He crept softly up the stairs, feeling his way by the statues which at intervals were placed there, and thinking to himself,

“If any one is coming this way, I shall see the light long before such person can see me, and I can then hide behind a statue.”

But no. The man continued to ascend cautiously even up to the corridor into which Almerie’s room opened. He saw a light under the door, and was satisfied his young master was there, and that he at least had not attempted to interrupt his own proceedings in the hall. He then crossed the corridor and descended by other flights of stairs to the servants’ hall, where he struck a light, and turned away to the scene of his work. The man had carried with him the tools he had been using and the lamp he had extinguished. He entered the hall, and, with a slight sense of awe looked round upon the mailed knights standing there, and, with a feeling of satisfaction, saw they all stood in their customary places, and in their usual positions. He then turned to the Baron Almerie and examined the cloth of the sleeve, to see if through any rent or hole the coin had slipped in. No, he saw no trace of the florin.

“Confound it!—it must be in the arm.” He stooped to take up the arm—it was gone! Pal-

mer, like Almeric, could scarcely credit his own eyes. He was sure he had placed it in a particular spot—it was not there. He looked round and round the hall. In much perturbation of mind he lamented the folly of touching such a thing as a statue in armour; and still he could not find the arm!

“As if I had not heard enough about the ghosts at Heraldstowe but I must actually tempt them by my own folly to torment me! Of course that cursed old Baron has swallowed his own arm. And he will disgorge it some day when the house is full of company, and convict me of having meddled with him. And all this hubbub for a paltry florin!—which florin *he* has pocketed, I suppose, for even that is not to be found. Humph! it is of no use to stay here; there, the clock strikes one! I shall have all the Barons coming down from their pedestals in another half minute.”

He reluctantly gave up the search, left the hall and went away to bed, but he did not sleep. He counted every hour, and every quarter, and tossed and tumbled about in a most unhappy frame of mind.

“What can I do?—how on earth get out of this dreadful scrape? Nobody will credit the facts I can tell—that I merely took off the arm of Baron Almeric and laid it at his feet for a few minutes, when, of its own accord, it vanished! It is an incredible thing. I do not believe in it myself. When morning breaks I will go and

search well, and if it is not there, why the ghosts must have "boned" it. I have never really believed in these Heraldstowe ghosts since I was a boy, at which time I could not refuse to credit the old housekeeper's, Mrs. Scattergood's, stories of what she had herself seen. But I see no satisfaction in disbelieving my own eyes. And if I do not find this arm, I shall know that ghosts *do* walk about Heraldstowe every night of their lives—if they have lives!"

Palmer waited impatiently for the earliest beams of light, and then still more impatiently for sufficient light to enable him to see in the dark hall of Heraldstowe; dark because the windows were filled with stained glass. When the sun at length shone brilliantly—but long before any one else was awake or stirring—he cautiously descended to the entrance hall.

There was nothing to be seen at Baron Almeric's feet, where he remembered he had placed the arm over night. His vexation and annoyance were very great.

"Some one of these old fellows has a spite against me, I am *sure* of that; but they cannot harm me in broad sunlight as it is now!"

He walked deliberately round the hall surveying each Baron from head to foot, and at length, to his utter amazement and perplexity, he saw the very arm he had himself taken from the Baron Almeric lying on the folded arms of the very contemplative looking Baron Adelbert. Palmer may be forgiven

if at first a sense of awe and dread made his hair almost stand on end. Had he seen the arm in this position in the night at the dread hour of "one," perhaps he might even have been unable to battle with the strong panic that at the moment almost paralyzed him. Gradually, however, taking courage from the broad glare of the sun, as well as from a sense of his own disgrace at Heraldstowe if he did not restore the arm to the statue, he began to look the difficulty in the face. And now—as he was not a tall man—to his increased dismay he saw he could not possibly reach the arm. In vain he walked up and down the hall and told himself he had not placed it there. Something must be done. Either he must by some means or other rescue Baron Almeric's arm from the clutches of Baron Adelbert, or—he must resign Heraldstowe, where he had lived from boyhood.

"There is no trusting these old fellows," said he with a nod at the barons. "If I fetch a chair and mount it so as to enable me to take away the arm, how do I know whether the old fool will let me have it? Or whether he may not just give me a confounded box on the ear and send me spinning on the floor. It is quite clear, however, that if I let it be known I have meddled with these barons I shall no longer be trusted at Heraldstowe. And then, though I do love the old place and the family, why I would rather go than live here untrusted and in disgrace. And I am sure," added he, his courage rising as the difficulties with which he

was surrounded seemed the greater, "I would rather have a good tussle with the old fool for the arm than lose Heraldstowe. I'll try your strength, old boy," said he, as he nodded to Baron Adelbert, and went to fetch a chair.

On his return into the hall after the absence of a minute or two, he gazed anxiously round, half hoping that the Baron Adelbert had been contented to give up the arm without a struggle ; but no. There he stood as silent and motionless as statues are expected to stand, and Palmer felt he must screw up his courage and prepare himself for consequences.

The Baron stood with folded arms—as we have recorded—and upon these lay the single arm of the Baron Almeric. When Palmer was about to mount the chair he kept his eye on the head of the statue ; but as the Baron's visor was closed he unfortunately could not *see* the expression of his countenance, and understand by that whether "he meant mischief." Then Palmer determined—as he got upon the chair—only to keep his eye on the folded arms of the Baron, so that if he saw the least movement he might be prepared to defend himself. And slowly and cautiously, and with a beating heart, in spite of his courage, he did at length find himself standing upright on the chair, able now not only to confront the Baron "face to face," but even to "look over" his helmet if he so pleased. And now a doubt took hold of him as to whether he should make a snatch at the arm and jump off the chair with his prize, before the old

Baron could "cuff him" for his impudence, or whether he should go more deliberately to work. He decided to feel his way, and for this purpose he touched the arm he wished to liberate. The statue still remained motionless. Encouraged by the good behaviour of the Baron, he now attempted to seize the arm; he lifted it with both hands, expecting that the Baron would resist his attempt to take it; but as there was no resistance he found, to his inexpressible joy, he was master of the prize; and with a strong desire to escape a sound box on the ear from the burley Baron, if he remained within reach of his mailed hand, he turned to spring hastily down, and incautiously upset the chair and fell all his length on the floor of the hall, clasp- ing convulsively to his chest the arm of Baron Almeric. Palmer was on his feet in a moment, ready to do battle with that sly Baron Adelbert, who had, no doubt, "kicked the chair from under his feet" on purpose to have him at his mercy. But to his astonishment there the Baron stood, in the same contemplative position and in the same motionless silence. If the Baron chose to keep quiet, Palmer certainly did not mean to stir him up to activity, and with a deep sigh of relief he turned to examine the arm he had so gallantly rescued.

Again his surprise almost mastered his courage. The arm was covered with blood, and he discovered his own nose was bleeding profusely.

"Confound the old fool," said he, as he tried to comfort his wounded nose. "I knew he would do

me a mischief. However, I do not care for a scratch like this. I'll soon set all right now."

And he immediately set to work to replace the arm of Baron Almeric. When this was done to his satisfaction, he had to attend to his own wounds, and to cleanse Baron Almeric's arm from the marks of the battle. He took away his tools and the chair, and went to bathe his face and to fetch water for the Baron. But a sudden faintness seized him, and he was compelled to keep the Baron waiting. He did not recover from this sensation of exhaustion; indeed, it so increased upon him that he felt he must make the best of his way to his own room and let the *Sieur Almeric's* arm take its chance. Perhaps he should recover in time to do away with the witness to the fight, if he rested a little. He found it impossible even to rest in an easy-chair; his brain seemed in confusion, the room seemed to spin round and round. Palmer decided he had better get into bed, for he knew that the barons were said to hold tilting matches occasionally in the Park, and that might account to Sir Hildebrand for the present state of the Baron Almeric's arm. He knew also that strange weird stories were told of these barons in armour—of their noisy revels in the hall on particular anniversaries—and of their midnight strolls on moonlight nights at certain seasons of the year, which, as we have said, since his boyhood Palmer had not credited.

But now his faith was shaken; he began to fear

there were more ghosts in Heraldstowe than he quite liked to think about. His nerves were unstrung—he fell ill; and when the household was all astir, each at his or her duty, Palmer was missed. He acknowledged, to the kind inquiries of his fellow-servants, that he felt very unwell; they sympathised greatly with him; he was well nursed, and supplied with every delicacy. His old master, Sir Hildebrand, sent him some choice bits from his own table; his young master, Almeric, went up and sat by his bedside, and talked with him. His young mistress, Miss Barrymore, inquired for him, and sent him a heap of interesting books to amuse him in his loneliness. And for a day or two Palmer had all the honours of invalidism, and all the luxuries that Heraldstowe could afford. In time his nerves strengthened; he enjoyed his rest, and the sympathy he excited, and recovered. But he never mentioned to any one that the “ghosts” were the cause of his illness.

CHAPTER V.

“COURAGE CONSISTS NOT IN HAZARDING WITHOUT FEAR, BUT IN BEING RESOLUTELY MINDED IN A JUST CAUSE.”

ALMERIC and Miss Barrymore were in their sitting-room, the windows opening upon the

balcony were wide open, and they were conversing before retiring to rest, and making lists of their numerous engagements, when Almerie's attention was suddenly arrested by gleams of light of different colours falling every now and then on the shrubs and statues which were visible from that locality.

"Look, Zara, look!—some one must be in the hall. Do you see how the rich colours of the stained glass appear on the white statues?"

"Impossible, my dear!" said she, as she gazed on the statues—"who can be there?—the servants have all retired to rest long ago."

"Then it is a thief, or thieves. Where is my revolver?—oh! here is a stick loaded at one end; this will do better," said he, as he attempted to leave the room.

"At least take a light, Almerie, and do be cautious. After all, it may be only one of the servants."

"Cautious?—what nonsense! I will see who it is."

Almerie crossed the corridor, and went down the flights of stairs that led to the servants' hall, &c., with the intention of catching this breaker of the laws of Heraldstowe on his or her return, and of putting queries as to the propriety of rambling about the house at night, and alarming the master and mistress. But the house was perfectly quiet; he did not meet with any one. And when he at length entered the entrance hall, that also was

perfectly still, and in darkness. He lifted up his light, and threw the gleams round the spacious apartment, to assure himself that all was safe, and saw—the Baron Almeric dismantled, and his arm—that very arm that had already been the scene of so many wonders to him—this arm lying at his feet.

Again Almeric rubbed his eyes, and almost doubted the evidence they gathered. He took up the arm—it was the rearbrace and the gauntlet together. He stood a minute or two in thought; he examined the arm and the statue, but could see nothing unusual.

“I will take it and show it to Zara,” said he—
“in multitude of counsel there is wisdom; I will have her opinion.”

He went up the grand staircase as he spoke, and finally reached his own apartments without having seen any one who could have been in the hall, or been instrumental in throwing the colours from the stained glass in the hall upon the statuary in the garden. When he related his adventures to Miss Barrymore—viz., that he had gone down the back stairs, and returned by the grand staircase, and found the house still and quiet, and the hall, instead of being lighted up, in perfect darkness—that he had not discovered any depredator, nor met with any domestic, and that the only strange thing he had encountered was the mailed arm of the Baron, which he had brought back with him.

Miss Barrymore looked a little awe-stricken. Both Almeric and Zara were well versed in the weird accounts of their ancestors. One legend was that, on certain nights of the year, they all marched out of the hall, and had "a passage of arms" by moonlight. Another that some two or three were found occasionally battered, and broken, and much defaced, on their pedestals in the hall, the suits of armour requiring considerable repairs after these nightly revels. The old house-keeper, Mrs. Scattergood, who was in power at Heraldstowe when Sir Hildebrand was a boy—she had *seen* the barons returning from their tournaments. And then it was well known—at least, Mrs. Scattergood said so—that the lords of Heraldstowe, in the middle ages, were as chary of allowing people to watch them as the Pixies in Cornwall. And if they were watched at their going out or coming in, or during their revels, it boded ill to the house of Barrymore. The old lady's lore had been handed down.

"Whenever you hear a noise in the hall at night be sure not to meddle. Do not go to see what it is, or you will vex the barons, for they do not like to be looked at—how should they?" she quaintly added; "they are not so young as they have been, take my word. And if you watch them harm will come."

Miss Barrymore and Almeric both recalled Mrs. Scattergood's advice as they stood examining the arm.

"But there was no noise, Almeric?" said Miss Barrymore.

"No, dear. I saw a light on the statuary—look, Zara, look, there it is again!"

With a deepening feeling of awe Miss Barrymore admitted she *did* see the light.

"What can it be, Almeric? You are sure the house is still? All the domestics have retired?"

"Still as death, Zara," said he solemnly. And then, fancying that his words only added to his sister's awe, he said in a more cheerful tone,

"I will tell you what it is, Zara—Baron Almeric looking wildly about for his arm!"

"Oh! Almeric, do not jest. I declare I quite shiver!"

"Well, my darling, I will not keep him waiting. I will go back and take him his arm."

"Go back!" said she, clinging to him.

"Yes, darling," said he in a firm but kindly tone. "I must go, love, come what may. But what will you do? You will not be afraid to be left?"

Now, as Almeric himself looked very pale—for he had the memory of the singular scenes with his mediæval ancestor to unnerve him, in addition to the unaccountable appearance of the lights from the hall windows and the mailed hand and arm he had brought to his sister—as he certainly looked pale, it is not to be wondered at that Miss Barrymore looked awestruck.

"Why must you go, Almeric? I shall fear some harm will happen to you."

"No, love," said he with a smile, "do not fear that. I shall return in a few minutes. I will leave this stick with you, Zara, that you may have something to use in my absence if you require anything, for old Baron Almeric will not harm me, though I may have vexed him and put him out of temper by running off with his arm. You look pale, darling; perhaps, like me, even you almost begin to believe in ghosts, or—or in something not to be accounted for."

"Do not go, Almeric?" said she entreatingly.

"Yes, I must. I am indeed determined to go."

"Then I will go with you," said she in a positive tone.

"You!—impossible!" said Almeric.

"And why? What is possible for you is possible for me," said she, again clinging to his arm.

"No, my dear sister, this must not be; sit down and let me explain." At this moment Almeric wished he could tell his sister all the trouble he had had with his mediæval ancestor, but he felt it would occupy too much time.

"And why may I not go?" said she.

"There is nothing that tends more to the conquering of ghosts than the bravery of man. In single combat, with fair play, I think the chances are on the side of man. Now, if you go with me, I shall feel in some sort as if I were too great a coward to go alone. I will never be that. I will face all the ghosts that walk the earth before I will consent to become a coward!"

"Oh! Almeric—dear Almeric!" said she entreatingly.

"And again, dear sisse, we all know the legends connected with these barons: 'If you meddle, disagreeably, that is, with any one, you fall into his power.' As Almeric quoted this legend, he remembered that he had interfered with the armour of the Baron Almeric, and that ever since that morning the Baron seemed to have great power over him; but he did not tell this to Miss Barrymore.

"My dear brother," said she in a tone of astonishment, "you know we have always laughed at these legends."

"True; and we have also laughed at and disbelieved in ghosts."

"Why, of course, yes!" said she wonderingly.

"I am not going to argue with you, my love, at this hour," for they both started as the loud clock boomed forth "*one*." "I may well say 'this hour,'" resumed he, "for it is the hour when spirits are supposed to have the power to walk the earth. The word spirit, I suppose, is synonymous with ghost. But though I will not argue with you, I think it right *to act* as if we did credit the legends, and so make all the reparation in my power, and take the old Baron his arm."

Miss Barrymore stood silently looking at her brother.

"I shall repent having brought it to show to you if you will not allow me to restore it quickly," said

he. And after a few minutes of silence he added, "My brave sister will remain here alone while I retrace my steps and give back to our great mediæval ancestor his good left arm."

At length Miss Barrymore consented, and he eventually went to the hall, and purposely placed the arm on the folded arms of the Baron Adelbert, for, unlike Palmer, Almeric Barrymore was tall. On his return he said,

"Now, if we find on the morrow that the *Sieur* Almeric has of his own accord replaced his own arm upon his own panoply——"

"Oh! but that cannot be," said Miss Barrymore interrupting.

"Then how came it off?—how came it to be lying at his feet?"

"It may have fallen," said she.

"Utterly impossible! I noticed it particularly as it lay at his feet, for my first idea was that it had fallen off. I soon saw that thought was untenable; it could not have been found in the position in which I saw it. I have carefully replaced it, and in the same position," but he did not tell Miss Barrymore he had changed the locality, "and as it lies now it looks as if some careful workman had taken it off and put it there out of the way until he is ready to replace it. And admitting, for the sake of argument, that the arm may have fallen off," for Almeric remembered that he himself had had it taken off, and it was possible that the smith had not properly replaced it; "what do you

then think of the coloured lights thrown from the windows of the hall?"

"Are we really quite sure that effect was produced from the hall windows?" said she.

"Ah! *you* are sceptical—long may you continue so. But, Zara, I shall write down these incidents exactly as they have occurred to-night, and in the morning, before we go down to breakfast, we will read them over, and so convince ourselves such things really have happened."

"Almeric!—the arm will surely be found lying where you have placed it now?" said she, enthusiastically, and as if in spite of all her previous awe, she was determined to view the event with thoroughly practical eyes.

Almeric shook his head deprecatingly. He did not like to confess to his sister all he knew, and, as he had admitted to himself, he certainly "began to believe in ghosts."

The brother and sister separated; but Miss Barrymore, when alone in her own apartment, confessed to herself that she was much more alarmed than she liked to admit to Almeric. She did not tell him that when he left her with an intention of replacing the arm of the Baron, she had watched for the flash of the light he carried upon the statuary on the lawns. No red and green and golden hues fell upon the statues when he was in the hall. And yet he had gone with a light to the very place that alone had power to colour inanimate nature by reflection in that locality.

“Why did not Almeric’s light cause the same wonderful colours to fall on the statues?”

She had not told her brother of this terrible addition to the weird fancies that now so crushingly crowded upon her. It was very late ere Miss Barrymore slept. And on this night even Almeric was deaf to the sounds of “*Dame Nature*,” whom he loved so well. And here, it should be observed that when Palmer took up his lamp to examine the Baron’s unmailed arm, the full glare was sent upon the large shields occupying the centre of the window over the door, and the rays from this window were then, from the position of the light, thrown to a distance. But Almeric, if he had returned to the hall bravely, had also gone impressed with a feeling of awe, and with no absolute necessity to raise his light high. He entered the hall, and placed his taper on the floor, while he carefully gave the arm into the keeping of the Baron Adelbert, and the low altitude of the light prevented the coloured rays being thrown to a distance.

CHAPTER VI.

“DESERT AND REWARDS GO NOT OFTEN TOGETHER.”

WE left the Lady Grel Stuart seeking the Earl, her uncle, at Prellsthorpe Park, and

the Lady Irene and Mr. Hamilton enjoying the gratification of a morning stroll amid beautiful scenery. Eventually the party met at luncheon, and Grel had, between her now awakened fear of Mr. Hamilton and her constant dread of her cousin Danby, much ado to keep a brave countenance, and look and act as if she had no "sensitiveness," and no "individuality." Lord Danby teased her *sotto voce*, Mr. Hamilton never turned his eyes upon her, and her uncle petted her with kind words and a sympathising voice. He saw Grel was not at her ease, but he had no clue to the real mischief. Grel was becoming very reticent, and, it must also be recorded, very mistrustful of her cousins. During the desultory conversation that occurred, Grel was applied to on one occasion for an opinion. Instead of at once replying, as she would naturally enough have done on former occasions, she hesitated at first, and then said hurriedly, and with a troubled expression of countenance,

"Oh! pray, Irene, do not ask me; I only say or do something wrong, and get much blame. I do not understand the subject."

The shrinking sort of dread that the Earl fancied he saw incite Grel to avoid giving an opinion upon a common topic, induced him to try and encourage her, and, besides, he had convinced himself that Mr. Hamilton's presence had, somehow or other, been instrumental in making her thus so little at her ease. He said, therefore, smilingly,

"Grel, dear, I feel sure Mr. Hamilton will put on his cap of mercy when he judges you, however little you may know on the topic in hand, so do not fear to let us have your thoughts."

Mr. Hamilton raised his eyes, and looked at Grel, whose countenance at once belied any hope of *his* mercy; but as it rapidly passed through his mind that Grel might have been confessing to her uncle her own unmaidenly conduct in making an assignation with Mr. Maynooth, and as this made her case so much the better in his eyes, he turned to the Earl and said, in cold, hard tones,

"Then do you think she will deserve mercy?"

"Oh! yes," said Lord Prellsthorpe, laughingly, and wishing to support Grel, and inspire her with courage—"take my word for that."

"Then, upon your word, I will show mercy to her," said Mr. Hamilton, as he again turned to Grel, for he thought the Earl alluded to the scene in the Park.

"Show mercy to Grel!" said Irene in surprise—"why, what has she done? But suppose she should claim your promise when you least expect it?"

Mr. Hamilton, as he looked once more at Grel, was again attracted by the shy and guileless expression of her eyes, and now he smiled, as he turned to Irene and said,

"I still promise that I will show mercy to her."

"Such mercy as the *law* allows?" said Grel,

impulsively joining in the conversation, as she listened to Mr. Hamilton's evident intention to think well of her.

"I will *break* the laws for you, and grant you mercy when you do not deserve it," said Mr. Hamilton playfully, and in his turn struck with the sparkle in Grel's eye and her look of conscious innocence. This was *not* the first time Mr. Hamilton had admired Grel, but he admired her now more than ever, from the inward conviction that he had misunderstood the scene in the Park.

"When *you* think I do not deserve it?" said Grel pointedly. For she knew he had misjudged her, and somehow she felt that she was fighting her own battles, and that he would understand she alluded to their meeting in the Park before luncheon. He did understand, and replied quickly.

"Happily put;" and then with a smile and a glance that told Grel she had convinced him of her innocence of intentional ill, he added, "when appearances are against you."

A playful discussion followed; but enough has been recorded to show that Grel knew she was restored to Mr. Hamilton's good opinion, and on her return home she felt this to be a great comfort in the midst of her many troubles. When she passed the trees in the Park and recalled Mr. Maynooth's tall and handsome figure, and remembered his rude, intrusive stare, and, as she thought, his still more rude words, Grel's indignation was very great—the greater as she remembered Mr.

Hamilton's courtesy. She nursed in her inmost heart a bitter feeling towards Mr. Maynooth which he did not deserve, and she again placed Mr. Hamilton on a secret shrine for her own private worship. But even here Grel was wrong; Mr. Hamilton did not deserve his pedestal; for when he, on his return from the Park to the Abbey came also upon the same group of trees where in the morning he had been an unwilling witness to some part of the scene between Lady Grel and Mr. Maynooth, Mr. Hamilton's memory was as retentive as hers; but as he recalled the two figures seated there his first impression was strengthened, viz., "that the Lady Grel Stuart had acted in a very unmaidenly and unladylike way to seat herself under trees with a gentleman alone, and that he did not approve of such doings, and could not entirely forgive such unseemly conduct." Mr. Hamilton forgot his promise "to show mercy to her when appearances were against her," and once more he judged her harshly.

When the Lady Grel returned to the Rectory she was not at all the more satisfied that Mr. Maynooth had been there, and in part recounted to her friends what had taken place in the Park. The Cheethams tried to explain to her that he was so astonished at her real heroism in suppressing a scream that, if uttered, would have caused the dog to spring upon him, that for the moment he was speechless.

She did not tell them "it was not his silence,

but his looks, and his daring to touch her," that had so powerfully offended her. They said nothing to her of her own inadvertence in seizing his arm unsolicited; she concluded, therefore, he had had the manliness *not* to expose her error. But even for this she was not grateful. It did not even soften her feelings towards him; and yet she felt a certain sort of satisfaction that this unmaidenly conduct on her part was not known to her friends.

And now another dread hung over her. She feared to meet Mr. Maynooth anywhere—she feared that he might call at the Rectory—that from a sort of necessity he must call to make inquiry after her hand. She had not removed her glove at Prellsthorpe, to avoid exposing the extent of the evil and to save herself from disagreeable questions. But at the Rectory she was obliged to show it to Mrs. Cheetham. The glove was difficult to remove, the rings also were troublesome to get off, the diamonds had lacerated the flesh, broken the skin, and though, when the hand was examined by Mrs. Cheetham she saw that the wounds would soon heal, still they must be cared for and plastered, and the hand disfigured by wrappings for a time.

Brenda Cheetham cut jokes upon Grel and her many admirers. "The long Maynooth," as she, in Grel's opinion, uncourteously called him, "was taken by her charms." Grel was very indignant, and Brenda very suspicious. Suspicious, because

Mr. Maynooth was so universally popular with ladies that not to approve him could only be accounted for by preference to some other. Did Grel, then, love her cousin Danby, though she affected the contrary? This was not the first occasion that had given rise to that query from Brenda Cheetham. And now her cheeks tingled with the thought, her jealousy and watchfulness were aroused, and Brenda determined in her own mind that if she too were the victim of Lord Danby's inconstancy, that she would take a full and ample revenge. Brenda was a type of "Maidenhood" more common than many people think. She was an eye-witness of Lord Danby's preference for his cousin Grel, and ear-witness of his constant professions of admiration for her—a daily witness of those innumerable small attentions that gentlemen bestow upon ladies to whom they are supposed to be attached, and which Lord Danby always showed to Grel; and yet Brenda—when he chose to whisper in her ear that her attractions were greater than Grel's—Brenda believed him!

Lord Danby never noticed Brenda Cheetham in the presence of others, scarcely so much, certainly not more than any other lady, and yet she thought that she herself, and no other lady, possessed his heart! And so, as we have said, this is not unusual in the errors of "Maidenhood," and we conclude it brings its own punishment. The man who can "profess" to many, or to more than

one, cannot be worthy even of one. And the sooner "Maidenhood" learns that truth the better. Meanwhile here is another foe to the peace of mind of the Lady Grel—a watcher over her every look, a recorder of her every word, a hidden enemy in the guise of a sympathising friend!

Falling in the estimation of so many as Grel has done, it would be hard if she did not create a new friend here and there, and so, on the very day after these occurrences, the quiet Rectory at Prellsthorpe was invaded by strangers.

Mistress Nuala Maynooth, a maiden lady, resident at Wolfscrag, in the neighbourhood of Heraldstowe, and aunt to Mr. and Miss Maynooth, who have already been introduced, now made inquiries for the Lady Grel Stuart. She was accompanied by her neice, Miss Maynooth, and both ladies, though not at all on terms of intimacy with the Cheethams, nevertheless, made themselves very agreeable to Mrs. Cheetham and Brenda on this occasion.

The Lady Grel was unpardonably long ere she made her appearance, and Mrs. Cheetham began to feel some little annoyance at her prolonged absence, which was greatly added to when, on her introduction to these ladies, she assumed a cold and proud manner. But Grel had learned before she ventured to confront the visitors that they were the relatives of Mr. Maynooth, and as she had made up her mind he was the most ungentlemanly person she had ever seen, she allowed the two ladies

who came so sympathisingly to call upon the lady whom "Raymond confessed he had hurt through his own thoughtlessness," to see that she did not reciprocate their kind feelings. Lady Grel begged Miss Maynooth would tell her brother "she really was not hurt—indeed, she must hope he would entirely forget that he and herself had accidentally met in the Park, since to recall the fact could not be productive of pleasure to either!"

"You say you are not hurt," said Mistress Nuala in a kind tone, though she was not deaf to the rather petulant tone of Grel's voice, "you say you are not hurt, and yet we see your hand is bandaged."

"Yes," said Grel, since she could not deny so plain a fact; "but the injury is so slight it is not worth noticing," added she in cold and formal tones that certainly were not encouraging to her visitors.

The old lady looked at her silently and steadily for a few seconds, and then said,

"I am not here, my dear young lady, to plead for Raymond; he must make his own apology at a more suitable time. Unintentionally he has given you pain, this he himself told me, and it would be unmanly and unfeeling not to have a certain anxiety for his involuntary fault." The shrewd old lady had read Grel's inmost thoughts, and comprehended the powerful dislike she nourished towards Mr. Maynooth, and yet she wished very much to create for herself a favourable impression

if possible, and she added courteously, "I also must assuredly feel an interest in the lady who so accidentally became a martyr and a heroine at the same moment, and on my own account I am here to see the one whose courage and absence of selfishness could so resolutely preserve my dear nephew from the attack of a powerful dog. You will, I am sure, my dear young lady, at least pardon my enthusiasm and credit my gratitude," continued she, as in rising to depart she extended her hand to the Lady Grel, "if you still think it right to feel indignant towards him!"

These words aroused all the better feelings of Grel's nature, or rather put to flight for the time those she had so perseveringly nursed against Mr. Maynooth. She accepted the proffered hand with a smile, and even placed her other upon it to detain it, as she said,

"It will always be remembered by me from this time, as a happy mischance, since it has given me the pleasure of being made known to you, and if you will allow me to call at—at——"

"Wolfscrag," said Mistress Nuala Maynooth.

"Thanks—at Wolfscrag, I will come and show you the progress I make; indeed, my hand has almost recovered," said Grel.

"I shall have much pleasure. I hope you will come to me, though you may know I am a sad recluse, I go out—or rather I visit—but little; but I am always glad to receive my friends, and I shall be most happy to include you in the number."

At this point Grel thought the old lady showed so much eagerness to secure her, that probably she was only thinking of her nephew, and trying to bring her again into his presence. And yet in another second she was ashamed of this suspicion, and acknowledged to herself that she liked the lady, and she would try to know her better. To cover the confusion so plainly expressed in her countenance, she stammered out,

“I am so young and—and uninformed, but I feel sure I shall like to call if you will allow me.”

Grel's simplicity amused the old lady, though she was too well-bred to show it; she turned to Mrs. Cheetham and said, “I am generally disengaged from breakfast till late in the afternoon, and as I shall greatly prefer friendly to formal calls I trust Lady Grel may be allowed to visit me at any convenient early hour. When my nephew Raymond comes it is late in the day, to dine and spend the evening. Yolande cannot come so far alone, and so you see I might almost as well be without my young relatives since I see them so seldom.”

“When Raymond and I make up our minds to spend a week or two with Aunt Nuala,” said Miss Maynooth, “she improves so in health and spirits that we are quite sorry to leave her.”

“I enjoy the society of young people,” said Mistress Nuala; “and as Yolande and Raymond generally come and tell me their troubles, you will understand how soon I was made aware of his thoughtlessness to you, and that for my own

comfort it became necessary to make an early call of inquiry. And now I shall indeed be glad if you will kindly come and see me in my lonely home."

Mrs. Cheetham promised that the Lady Grel should certainly go to Wolfscrag, and the ladies departed. Then the Lady Grel fell to musing, and confessing to herself "that old lady had read every thought she had had while in her presence." And here we may remark that the thoughts and feelings of "Maidenhood" are generally, if the lady be sensitive, distinctly impressed on her countenance. Unconsciously, to the experienced matron or the man of the world—unconsciously "Maidenhood" lays bare its hopes, its fears, its pleasures, its regrets, with every passing change of expression. The more unsophisticated is "Maidenhood," the more easily is the page of her thoughts deciphered.

Grel felt all this, and fell to musing; but the old lady had studied the fair countenance of the young girl, and went away satisfied. When Mrs. Nuala Maynooth was again seated in her comfortable carriage, she remained silent for a few minutes. At length she turned to her niece, and said,

"Do you say Raymond is serious in his admiration of this young lady?"

"It is so difficult to understand him on the subject of love or marriage, for he has a pernicious habit of jesting at the mention of either," said

Yolande. "He, who is really so sensible, and so little prone to talk nonsense—he tries my patience sorely, dear aunt, on this subject. If I credit his own words, he admires the Lady Grel more than any lady he has ever seen ; but even that is not saying much."

"You said, some little time ago, when we were driving to Prellsthorpe Abbey, that he admired the Lady Irene—has he really changed?—and do you think he admires her cousin, Lady Grel, more?"

"His admiration of the Lady Irene was put to flight the moment he saw her cousin ; and that is one reason that I cannot put faith in his likes and dislikes ; he is so inconstant, he tries my patience," said Yolande.

Again the old lady sat thoughtful and silent. Miss Maynooth at length broke in upon her reverie by saying—

"What is your opinion of the Lady Grel?"

The old lady slowly shook her head, and did not reply.

"I know you do not admire the Lady Irene," pursued Yolande. "But Lady Grel does not seem so haughty as her cousin."

"No, my dear—she is not haughty," said the old lady, at length putting an end to her reverie ; "she is not haughty—she is proud. I admire her, perhaps I could love her, but that remains to be proved. I am sure she is amiable, and I would not aver that of her cousin, Lady Irene."

"I thought proud and haughty were very much the same, dear aunt?" said Yolande.

"There is a dignity in pride, my dear, that will not permit its possessor to do a mean action; but a haughty lady imagines herself upon a pedestal higher than others; she scorns, slights, and sneers at those often more worthy than herself."

Miss Maynooth was accustomed to this somewhat pedantic form of speech from Aunt Nuala, and did not reply.

"She will come and see me," resumed the old lady; "she is frank and unsophisticated—I speak of the Lady Grel—but it will take time to win her confidence."

"I have seldom met her, but, singularly enough, always felt attracted by her, dear aunt," said Yolande.

"It was not to be expected, my dear, that you should be very intimate with Mr. and Mrs. Cheetham, who are, as I have understood, the guardians of this lady; but now, for Raymond's sake, we must try to become a little more friendly. If he really can turn his thoughts to love and marriage—and it is high time he did so—I shall try to clear the path from all obstacles."

"Through this mischance you think you see an opening for more intimacy, dear aunt," said Yolande, "both with the Cheethams and Lady Grel?"

"Yes. And if Raymond could become a little more like his former self—that is, keep himself

within the bounds of moderation—for, my dear Yolande, if he be really in love he will be as eager for the society of the beloved one as he has hitherto cared nothing for any one. And, therefore, as I say, if he could keep quiet—above all things, keep away from Wolfscrag in a morning when he has an idea that the young lady is with me——”

“Keep away, dear aunt!” said Yolande, in surprise.

“Yes—keep away—absent himself. Do you think I shall make it my business to trepan Lady Grel into a liking for Raymond against her own will?”

“Oh! no, not exactly that,” said Yolande. “But if Raymond is to avoid coming to Wolfscrag when Lady Grel is with you, how is he to know her? I thought he would have so good a chance of seeing her often that——”

“Not in my house,” said Mistress Nuala in very stately tones. “And if he cannot take time to win the lady in a steady, thoughtful way he will lose her.”

“Dear aunt, I feel sad at the very thought,” said Yolande. “Because he is so very difficult to please, and I quite fear, if he is unsuccessful with this lady, he will go on another long ramble for perhaps even a greater number of years, and then dear old Mitreberis must be shut up again.”

“And you, dear Yolande, must come back to me and Wolfscrag. Yes, all this is very possible,

but it is of little use to attempt to look into futurity. We must do our best with the circumstances in our power and leave the rest to Him who guides and cares for all. I shall do my part. I shall try to know the lady, to know the inmost recesses of her heart. She seems guileless, unlike her cousin the Lady Irene. And yet, Yolande, I ought to speak more guardedly, for I know but little either of Lord Danby or his sister. They have not made a favourable impression on this side of the county ; but we must not judge harshly from such small intimacy."

Yolande thought within herself that her Aunt Nuala's judgment was very greatly to be relied upon. This she knew from experience, but then she also knew that when her opinion was unfavourable, the kind old lady always tried to temper it with forbearance.

"Raymond must woo very quietly if he would win the Lady Grel," said Aunt Nuala ; "at present she has, I should fancy, a dislike to him. Tell him to keep quiet and——"

But the carriage stopped at Mitreberis, and the old Lady did not finish her sentence.

"Suppose you stay and dine with us, dear aunt ? And then you will have plenty of opportunity for giving Raymond good advice."

"Good advice !" said Mistress Nuala laughing. "Yes, my dear ; but young men hate to be advised by old women. Good morning, my dear. Thanks for your kind invitation, but I will dine at home, and leave you to manage Raymond."

CHAPTER VII.

“THERE IS SOME VIRTUE OR OTHER TO BE EXERCISED
WHATEVER HAPPENS.”

ON the morrow at Heraldstowe, when Miss Barrymore awoke, she tried to persuade herself that the lights she had seen on the statues and the falling off of Baron Almeric's arm were only the remains of an unpleasant dream. But this hope was dispelled by Almeric knocking at her door, and telling her he wished to have a chat before they went to breakfast. Accordingly they met in the sitting-room, and Almeric produced the paper he had written of the actual facts as they occurred on the preceding evening.

“Well, dear Almeric, it is of no use to fuss about such things. We two are satisfied that we have had the Baron's arm here in this room; but if we find it in the hall exactly as you left it—and what should prevent this?—there will then be nothing mysterious; the arm dropped from the statue, that is all!”

“I quite admire your eloquence, Zara,” said he; “and you will be contented when I say that I agree with all you have said. If the arm accidentally dropped from the statue, then we may naturally expect to see it this morning lying where I placed it last night. And most assuredly in that

case we need not fuss ourselves for the foolish legends that connect such accidents with destruction or death to some one of the family. But if——”

“Oh! nonsense, Almeric. The arm *must* be found exactly where you left it. I do not believe in ghosts.”

Miss Barrymore spoke in a tone of confidence, but Almeric interrupted her by saying in a very quiet tone,

“Did you see the many-coloured lights on the statues, Zara? Did you or did you not?”

“Some reflection, perhaps, caused by the moon, which we were not clever enough to comprehend. You see, Almeric,” said she now enthusiastically, “ghosts would not require lights—they can see in the dark.”

“No, they would not probably require lights, and yet grandpapa’s old housekeeper, Mrs. Scattergood, always spoke of the hall having been seen lighted up on those occasions of the revels, when the barons had been tilting in the Park. One of her long stories has the description of the coloured lights falling on the marble statues in the gardens. I remember the account perfectly.”

“Was it then that Heraldstowe was robbed of the massive gold plate, Almeric? We in our day would much more naturally connect such unusual lights at so unusual an hour with thieves than with ghosts,” said Miss Barrymore.

“The house was robbed during the reign of the

old Mrs. Scattergood, but I never heard any particulars beyond the fact that very valuable plate was carried off, and no trace of it ever after discovered. That had nothing to do with the marauding barons nor the many coloured lights that I ever heard, Zara; and I feel sure we saw last night the very same curious appearance the old dame was known to describe so well."

"Yes, we may have seen the very same coloured lights, but this does not prove them to be otherwise than ordinary wax lights," said Miss Barrymore—"this does not prove them to have been supernatural."

Almeric shook his head despondingly, and they descended to breakfast. When they were near the bottom of the stairs Miss Barrymore pushed by her brother and ran quickly down into the hall.

There stood the Baron Almeric Marmaduke Barry-Barrymore in the self-same position in which he had been known to stand for weeks, months, and years. His arm was no longer in the keeping of Baron Adelbert, but an absolute part of his own panoply. Miss Barrymore stood gazing with some degree of wonder and awe when Almeric slowly entered the hall.

"I foresaw this, Zara," said he. He did not add, "I know more about the doings of this our great ancestor than you," but he certainly was not surprised to see the arm restored to the statue, and yet, curiously enough, he turned to look at Baron Adelbert, half expecting to see him still clutching

the arm he had given him on the preceding night. "If we had not written down last night before retiring to rest," resumed he, "the scene as it actually occurred, we should now think we had passed through a dream—a singular dream certainly—since we both had the same dream at the same time. But no, facts are stubborn things. Well," added he, taking his sister by the hand, "suppose we breakfast."

A good deal of conversation ensued at the morning meal on the subject of the legends, or prophecies connected with the statues, and of the occurrences of the preceeding night. Miss Barrymore suggested that it was a trick of some kind, and Almeric told her he had had that idea for some weeks.

"For some weeks, Almeric!" said she in a tone of alarm. "Then has the Baron Almeric been in the habit of dropping his arm at night and putting it on again in the morning without any apparent assistance from mortals?"

"Not that I am aware of," said he.

And then he remembered that he had never told her of any one of the marvellous sights he had seen; of the numbers of times the Baron Almeric had left his pedestal in the hall and given his company to his descendant. Nor of the wonderful way in which the coins had managed to go from one place to another—apparently without help of mortal kind; but which he himself was certain had been the case.

He fancied, too, that all these strange doings were more or less connected with the "six-angel piece," a topic that it was unpleasant to him to introduce. But recovering himself, he broke the silence that had fallen upon them both, and said,

"And now, Zara, can you ask me to leave Heraldstowe for the sake of my health, when the very fact of leaving you here alone would be a corroding care that would embitter every moment of my life. For you are all but alone; our dear grandfather can never be told of these existing—existing and extraordinary occurrences! Can you ask me, under such circumstances, to leave you?"

The tears rose unbidden to Miss Barrymore's eyes, as she too recalled the fact of having accidentally left the cabinet doors unlocked, and that this carelessness on her part had been the cause of Almeric's illness and of the necessity for his absence from home. But she replied with an attempt at a smile, though her tears pattered unheeded upon her dress.

"Do you then think me too cowardly in my nature to be left to cope alone with these old barons or their ghosts? If—as you said last night—a ghost has no power against the bravery of a man, I think the bravery of a woman might put to flight a score!"

Almeric slowly shook his head.

"I will walk through the hall alone to-night, Almeric, I will go alone," continued she, her courage rising with the occasion. "I will go alone and

tell the barons I am their young descendant, the last lady of their race, and that by all the laws of chivalry I command them to obey me, to keep quiet on their pedestals, to let their arms remain attached to their panoplies for a few years, at least, and to stand still in their places, as respectable barons ought to do, and especially during the absence of the heir to Heraldstowe, gone—poor dear fellow—to recruit his health and strength! Ah! Almeric, if to be brave will keep the ghosts in order I will be the bravest of the brave.”

Almeric again shook his head with a deprecating smile.

“I will lay the ghosts, Almeric ; for go you must. Dr. Quinn has spoken to me so positively on the subject that it would be vain to attempt to dispute his orders. I shall grieve—deeply grieve—to part with you. But it is for your good, and I yield. As for dear grandpapa, he is like myself ; he only consents to lose you for a time that you may eventually be restored to us in health and spirits.”

The colour returned to her cheek as she tried to convince Almeric of the necessity for his absence from home, and she playfully held her position against Almeric’s arguments, that she would go alone into the hall, not only for one night, but for seven successive nights, and the conference ended by Almeric offering to make terms with his sister.

“State them,” said she ; “for, as I have said, go you must ; and for myself, dear Almeric, I feel

brave enough for ten thousand ghosts when I think of your health."

"My dear sisse," said he in a kind tone, and pressing her hand; "first, then, you must allow me to go with you into the hall."

"No, Almeric," said she in a tone of decision. "By your own confession last night, when you would not allow me to accompany you, that would do away with all my heroism. I must go alone to the hall at the dread hour of *one*—I must positively be in the hall when the great clock strikes the hour. I must parley with the old barons then. Ah! they are much too chivalrous to hurt a lady, and more especially me, their young descendant. So now, Almeric, put aside that stipulation; I do not accede to it. Begin again; now what have you to say?"

"First, then," resumed Almeric, "if you come safely back from the hall within two minutes——"

"Five, Almeric. I shall not have time to make my speech to the good gentlemen, nor to record their replies in my retentive memory in less time than five minutes. Indeed, I may probably be ten, for they may be very courteous, and ask me to remain and—and sleep with them, or——"

"Do not jest, Zara—do not jest. The morning sun now pours his bright beams upon us, the birds sing, all nature is alive. Light, blessed light! allows us to distinguish both near and distant objects; all these are present now, but in the night the reverse is the case—nature is silent, the

land is dark. All things in the absence of light are magnified in size, and apparently altered in position; your own imagination betrays you into extraordinary conceptions, which again compel you to commit actions that by day and in a strong light perhaps you would scorn to do, and——”

“Why, Almeric!” said Miss Barrymore in a tone of surprise, “you might have gone through all this yourself, and if you have, your courage was equal to the occasion; therefore you should the rather teach me to act through your experience than seek to deter me from——”

“From an act of heroism, I grant,” said Almeric interrupting, “but of very unnecessary heroism. However, you may say a good deal in five minutes, and I think by that time, and in spite of the courtesy of our ancestors, even *you* will have had enough and be glad to come away. And so I agree to wait say five or six minutes before I intrude upon your parley, and if you return safely from the hall in about that time, and without having had any fright of——”

“Oh! no, Almeric. I daresay I shall terrify myself out of my senses, but that must all mean nothing, for of course it will be my own fault.”

Almeric replied only by a shake of his head.

“And what is your next proposal?” said she.

“I will not consent to leave Heraldstowe,” said he, “until you have called all the county together and given me a grand fête.”

Miss Barrymore sat silent from the excess of her surprise.

"I will have a moonlight fête on the lawns; dancing and——"

"My dear Almeric," said Miss Barrymore interrupting, "consider our dear grandfather. We live, as you know, in this quiet way on his account. And——"

"And I will hear no more, Zara. I will ride over to that abominable Dr. Quinn and tell him to his face that if I may not have a fête I will not go."

Almeric spoke very angrily, and Miss Barrymore remembered that she ought not to contradict him—that by the orders of his medical attendant Almeric was to do pretty much as he pleased.

"Dr. Quinn has no power to prevent you having a fête, Almeric," said she. "I was thinking of our dear grandfather; but I will speak to him and see what can be done," added she despondingly, for she knew it was of importance that Almeric should leave home soon, and to get up a fête would require time.

"I will settle that matter, Zara. Dear grandfather never refuses anything in reason, and I am sure, when I am about to be banished from my home for an unknown length of time, the least that can be done is to let me see our friends before I go."

"It takes so long to get up a fête," said she. "But believe me, I shall be most willing to help

you in any way. You see, dear, we cannot prepare the grounds and get people together in less time than——”

“Where there is a will there is a way,” said he interrupting her. “I am determined to have this fête, I do not care how simply got up ; it is the people I care to see. I should like to call the whole county together and so see all our——”

“The whole county, Almeric ! Bless me, what shall I do ?” said Miss Barrymore. “*Why* the whole county ?” added she in her astonishment, and forgetting Dr. Quinn’s orders.

“You throw cold water on all I say, Zara ; but now I will try to meet you half-way.”

Miss Barrymore did not reply, and Almeric wrote a list on the back of an envelope, and tossed it to her as he added,

“Here is a list of those who *must* come, or who must be invited. You may add any others you please.”

“These are, for the most part, our very intimate friends,” said she, as she cast her eye over the list. “If you would be contented with these, perhaps I could manage. At all events, I will talk the matter over with dear grandpapa, and see what can be done.”

“I will be satisfied,” said he ; “and, therefore, if you are able to fulfil the part you propose to yourself, and confront the burly barons in their own hall, and return thence scathless, then——”

“Oh ! nonsense, of ‘scathless,’ Almeric. I

know I shall be terrified—I do not well see how I can be otherwise, though, indeed, I mean to try and have heaps of courage. But what I wish to impress upon you, Almeric, is that, though I have no faith in ghosts, and the greatest reliance on the barons treating me with all due courtesy, and though I am determined to go through with the undertaking as I have proposed, still, as a woman—I may even say as a girl—I may be liable to succumb in a case where one of your sex would stand and conquer. But you must let such weakness pass as a womanly weakness rather belonging to my sex than to any real cause.”

“Very prettily put,” said Almeric, laughing—“I am to promise to leave you to be terrified out of your senses by ghosts, and rewarded by a grand fête! We must come to a better understanding than this.”

When Almeric and Zara saw the statue of the Baron Almeric before they went to breakfast, they had not either of them noticed the stain upon the gauntlet and arm, caused by Palmer’s unfortunate wound when he fell. Later in the day Almeric discovered it. When the sun fell upon it, it had a glaringly objectionable look; but when in the shade, the stain was but little seen. Almeric sighed deeply as this appearance became visible to him. He knew all the legends of the house—those to which Palmer had referred—and he thought he might assure himself that he knew also, even in these days, that the barons enjoyed a

game of "pitch and toss" occasionally. And if he might credit them with that, he did not see any difficulty in also accrediting them with an occasional fight, though why the armour should on that account be stained, was even a greater wonder than any other. Raymond Maynooth would soon have settled all this, and have discovered Palmer's visits to the hall; but Almeric Barrymore was of a different temperament. And besides, whether or not he believed in "ghosts," he had a real veneration for the armour at Heraldstowe, and was both annoyed and puzzled at the extraordinary things that occurred. He did *not* point out the stains on the arm to Miss Barrymore, and, fortunately, she did not discover them.

CHAPTER VIII.

"THERE IS A REMEDY FOR EVERYTHING COULD WE BUT
HIT UPON IT."

THE entrance hall of Heraldstowe must now be made clear to the comprehension of the reader. It was very spacious, and belonged to the old part of the house. The great doors opened into a large vestibule which occupied about three-fourths of the width of the hall. This vestibule

was not cut off by inner doors, neither was it less lofty than the hall itself; but there were rich draperies looped back on either side, that were occasionally used to shut out the cold. In the corners of the vestibule were enormous steel mirrors, which were the more conspicuous from their very bright polish. The walls were covered with trophies of arms, and graced by here and there a banner bearing curious devices, both in the vestibule and the hall, and also by quaint specimens of valuable and rare suits of armour. In the vestibule were two figures, one under each side window. These were both in a half-recumbent position, the heads so turned as to give the idea that they were conversing. One was in a "suit of splints," the other in "russet armour." In the hall were ten figures, all in complete armour of different kinds. These were standing, and in different attitudes. They represented the barons, ancestors of the present family of Barrymore. The splendid suits of armour were said to be the very same that in the crusades had been worn by the barons, whose names were thus handed down to posterity.

Opposite the doors was the grand staircase, which after the first ten steps branched off on either side and led into the corridors above. The arches in the hall on the right and left of the vestibule led respectively to the banquet and ball-rooms. The arches on each side of the stairs led to an inner and smaller hall, whence branched

the rooms in common use. The windows were filled with stained glass. The large rose window over the doors contained the arms of the Barrymores with alterations and additions from the time of William the Conqueror to the twelfth baron. The lesser lights on each side of the doors contained legends of saints in twelfth century glass, as did also the two large side windows in the vestibule. The two windows in the hall itself, on either side of the vestibule, were filled with stained glass in mazy and intricate patterns; as these windows were comparatively modern the colours were of lighter hues, and the glass itself more translucent than that in the vestibule.

As the hour drew near in which Miss Barrymore had promised to confront the barons in the hall at Heraldstowe, which we have thus attempted to describe, she confessed to herself that her courage became perceptibly less. During the day she had taken every opportunity of making her observations. She knew by name each of the ten barons standing erect in armour, as well as the two half-recumbent figures in the vestibule, and also his personal history. But she went many times on this day to rub up her memory and recall this almost forgotten lore.

The hall doors were open, and she saw the large expanse of the Park, as it lay flooded in light, beyond the parterre of flowers that immediately surrounded the house. She heard the splash of the fountains, the singing of birds, and the hum of in-

sect life, and these accompaniments to the light of day took away all feeling of solitude or dread of ghostly intrusion. But she knew in the night she should not be befriended by such cheering sounds; a deathlike stillness would pervade the scene; and thus, during the light of day, it was the more necessary to her to make herself perfectly acquainted with the position of each ancestor as he stood apparently looking down upon her, so that in the night with an imperfect light she might be able to explain to herself, or to understand any sight that might then seem unusual.

On one of her morning visits on this day the mid-day sun streamed through the large rose window over the door, and also through the two windows in the hall, and the effect was new, and in her opinion superb. The rich colours of the mediæval glass were thrown over the statues, and the scarlet and the blue and the gold seemed to colour the armour, and give a look of life to the inanimate objects. Miss Barrymore had often seen the sun produce effects of a similar kind, but, said she to herself,

“Never with such brilliant hues, never so to imbue with a look of life!” She stepped forward in an attitude of delight and surprise, and saw herself reflected first in one and then in another of the polished steel mirrors that stood in the corners of the vestibule. But she saw her own simple muslin drapery so coloured with all the hues of the rain-

bow, that as she stood looking at herself she could not help saying, "I never before saw myself covered with so radiant a halo of light in my whole life ! I feel encouraged by it, I shall become superstitious on the spur of the moment and call it a good omen, for I *must* come here at night," added she with a little sigh, "but I will screw up my courage to the sticking place, for dear Almeric's sake, and come and talk to you gentlemen," added she, as she turned and made a sweeping curtsy. And then she began to take note of each one separately.

"Let me see, Baron Godfrey stands with his drawn sword, happily turned up over his shoulder out of the way, and his magnificent shield on his left arm. Then Baron Adelbert stands with folded arms in a contemplative position, as if he had been a learned man, only that we know he lived in an age that was alike 'dark through ignorance and barbarous through poverty and want of refinement.' Then Baron Conrad, in spite of his warlike propensities, was also a troubadour ; his sword and shield are placed at his feet, and his quaint old instrument, something like a lute, in his hand. The Sieur Guy was a mighty warrior, as his enormous two-handed sword can testify ; his hands are crossed on the huge hilt, and the point rests on the ground. Then comes Theodoric ; I must say something civil to them all when I come here in the night."

But her reverie was interrupted by Almeric, who now entered the hall.

"And so you are getting up your speech in the presence of your audience, Zara?" said he.

"It is so long since I have taken any notice of these worthy barons that if their names and characters had not been engraven on my memory from babyhood I should almost require a re-introduction. But look, Almeric—do you not admire yourself in the steel mirrors?"

"I admire you," said Almeric; "your drapery is like a prismatic cloud. I have not before observed so glorious an effect from these windows."

"Perhaps the light material may be one cause, and perhaps also we have not been here to remain musing and observing as we do now, and at a meridian hour. The sun seems unusually garish to-day, the sky very clear—all these things together make up the magnificent whole. But do look at yourself, Almeric, as you stand by my side, how richly you are decked with the beauties of the rainbow!"

"We are certainly a very handsome couple," said Almeric, "and I should think our ancestors must be proud of us. Look at old Anselmo pointing his truncheon at us, how the sun seems to dance on his chain armour; he was a gallant old fellow!"

"They were all gallant, Almeric," said Miss Barrymore.

"Baldwin's death was the most poetical, though it seems odd to speak of a 'poetical death,'" said Almeric.

"The circumstances under which he met his death have been recorded in song," said Miss Barrymore. "But Sigismund, dying in the very moment of victory, and with the knowledge that he had saved the life of his sovereign, always seemed to me to have had the most glorious death. If one must die in battle, let it be with the consciousness that we have not, or do not, die in vain."

"Unfortunately we cannot select the precise moment," said Almeric. "But what have you to say of my namesake?"

"He was a great dictator of laws to his posterity," said she. "Grandpapa often refers to him. I have heard him say, 'You will find that in the code of the *Sieur Almeric*, handed down from his day to our own.'"

"Yes, he was a wonderful man for that day, which was not the age of learning. I have always looked upon him as my own particular patron," and Almeric, as he spoke, turned to look at his ancestor, and was glad to see he remained standing in his usual position, but the hideous stain still remained on his left hand.

"Then to him I will talk the most," said Zara, "and tell him how good you are, and ask him to bestow his mighty protection upon you."

"But it is all nonsense, Zara," said Almeric.

"I know it is, and so my courage rises the

higher. And then here is Lancelot; I never heard that he was a gay deceiver, like the Lancelot who loved the Queen Guenevere."

"They were men, my dear, and were like other men of the times in which they lived," said Almeric.

"Yes, Almeric," replied she. "But we have always been taught that they were good men and true."

"Undoubtedly; but they would be gods, and not men, if you divest them of the passions to which mankind are prone," said he.

"But I suppose it is quite possible to have the passions of men without falling in love with queens, and tempting them to their own hurt?" said Miss Barrymore.

"Love is a strange passion, Zara; and queens are women, to be wooed and to be won like any other of the same sex."

"You are most learned to-day, Almeric," replied she with a little laugh, as she added, "but we will change the subject. And now, as I see you prepared, pray tell me where shall you ride?"

"To the Pines," said he, and they separated.

At the dread hour of night Miss Barrymore put in practice her resolve, and descended to the hall.

Some slight preparations had been made early in the evening—that is, after the domestics were supposed to have retired for the night, and when it was well known that Sir Hildebrand was safe in his bed. Almeric himself had placed wax lights

in the sconces on each side of the steel mirrors, ready to light a few minutes before Miss Barrymore should enter. Although, as he said to his sister, "he was afraid that in that vast hall half a dozen candles would only serve to make darkness visible." And she had replied, "That will be quite sufficient, Almeric, dear, because if I do get in a fright, I shall know which way to run to find the stairs, and not rush into the arms of some terribly cross and angry baron!"

"I will go and light them twenty minutes before one," said Almeric, "so that they shall burn brightly when you enter."

"No, Almeric," said she in a tone of decision; "I must not have my courage so taken from me—I mean I must not be such a coward. '*Virtus in arduis*' is the motto of our house, and shall I suffer my 'courage' to succumb to the 'difficulties' with which I am surrounded? No! I, the last lady of the house of Barry-Barrymore, will at least be true to the old motto."

"Then what is the use of placing candles in the sconces if you refuse to have them lighted?" said he.

"I will take my own taper and——"

Tidum, tidum, tidum, went the chimes of the great clock, telling Miss Barrymore and Almeric that it was now three quarters of an hour past midnight, and consequently, if the lady meant to enter the hall before one, she had not many minutes to spare.

"I will take my own taper," resumed she with a little catch in her respiration, "and light the candles as soon as I enter."

"That will take you a long time, and you will become more and more nervous. I assure you 'courage' is not a reflective quality, it is a devil-may-care——"

"Hush, hush, Almeric! Do not at this——"

"At this strange weird hour," resumed he, "call up such disagreeable associations of idea. No, darling, no, I will not. But 'courage' is active fortitude, and you will make it 'passive' if you stand tampering with it in that way."

"I must go," said she, starting hastily up.

"Change your mind, love," said Almeric, "or let me go with you?"

"No."

And now Miss Barrymore's colour came brightly into her cheeks, and she drew her tall and commanding figure up to its full height, and looked so queenly and noble that Almeric said no more. He offered his hand as he said,

"Then since you are still resolved to face the barons alone, at least allow me to conduct you to the entrance."

They left the room together, and on the corridor that opened upon the stairs leading into the hall, they passed a clock. Miss Barrymore raised her taper to see how near it was to the hour of one.

"Two minutes—oh! Almeric, let me go!" said

she, disengaging herself, and running along the passage.

Almeric stood a second or two hesitating, and then thought he would return to his own room for a weapon of defence—that if his sister should be attacked or terrified by any “practical joker,” he would be able to defend her. He did so, and, returning to the corridor to watch the clock, he stood listening, but all was still.

Meanwhile Miss Barrymore passed hastily through the swing door that closed the corridor from the stairs that descended to the hall, and as she rushed on the chimes again began the “ti-dum” that heralded the near approach of the hour. The stairs curved, and in Miss Barrymore’s haste the taper went out; she turned to retrace her steps, but the chimes completed their warning and she felt her time was come. She remained standing, as it were spell-bound, and the clock struck one.

Miss Barrymore had instinctively closed her eyes when she found herself in the dilemma of darkness; but when the clock struck the hour she opened them with a start, and was surprised to notice that the hall was *not* dark. She raised her head proudly as she said to herself,

“I will stand my ground, come what may,”—for at first she fancied the candles had been lighted; she did not exactly affirm to herself “lighted by the barons,” but certainly the idea crossed her mind. She descended the few last steps, and gazed round

the hall, and then she saw that the full moon at this hour came in through the windows exactly as the sun had done at mid-day. The candles had *not* been lighted, the barons had not interested themselves in anything so intensely mundane ; the knights were again shrouded in hues of many colours, but the rays were much less brilliant than they had been in the morning. At the meridian hour the entrance doors had been wide open, and that part of the hall had been radiant with light. The doors were closed now, and consequently a deep shadow rested there. The steel mirrors, from the bright polish of their surfaces, were visible to her, though they were in the dark part of the hall. All this Miss Barrymore saw in a few seconds, as she stood with heaving bosom but determined will in the presence of the representatives of the dead.

“ I come to bespeak your help, if you can give help, your——”

She had quite forgotten all she had intended to say, and the tones of her voice sounded so hollow and tremulous she felt half alarmed by them. But again, determining to put a brave face on the matter, she stepped boldly forward and saw some one move in the darkness at the back of the hall.

“ Stay where you are, I command you !” said she, raising her voice as she spoke.

All was still. She looked furtively round the hall to try and discover which of the barons had left his pedestal. They were all standing mutely,

much as they had done when she entered. The flickering moonbeams and many coloured rays throwing halos round their helmets. She turned to examine or peer into the darkness of the far part of the hall as well as she could, and half expecting to see the two recumbent barons in the vestibule—Rollo and Bohemond—standing upright. The vestibule was not so well lighted by the moonbeams as the hall, because its side windows of mediæval glass were of much darker hues than those in the hall. These last, as we have before recorded, were comparatively modern, and the thin transparent glass admitted the gleams of the moon more easily.

She advanced eagerly peering into the vestibule, her own figure catching the full light of the moon from the two windows in the hall, and as she slightly bent her head forward she distinguished by the movement herself reflected in the steel mirrors. The barons, Rollo and Bohemond, were in the shade, and barely visible to her straining eyes; but she saw they had not altered their position. The blood bounded back through her veins, and with a smile she once again raised her head proudly; her memory, that had proved so treacherous only a few minutes before, now returned in full strength. She began to realise and to feel confidence in her position.

“I, the only living lady of the house of Barry-Barrymore, come to you, my great ancestors, to propitiate your——”

She paused in dismay. Certainly some two or three of the barons had bowed their heads. She turned from those statues that seemed to be standing still and quiet to gaze upon the troubadour, who had, as she thought, raised his harp as if he would strike up a lay. For a moment, half in consternation, half in doubt at what she actually saw, she closed her eyes, to shut out such wonderful courtesies, and then, awaking again to the novelty of her position, she opened her eyes, and resumed her speech.

“I wish to propitiate your good will—to ask you, by all the laws of chivalry, *not* to come from off your pedestals, or walk about the house, or——”

The moonbeams had been toying with the crossed hands of Baron Guy that had rested so firmly on his huge sword when she entered—but now—surely he was lifting one hand from the other!

“Or do anything unusual,” added she breathlessly, as she fixed her eye steadily on Baron Guy, who kept in check by her commanding looks, remained in the same position and did *not* raise his hand. And then remembering it was not at all *unusual* for the barons to hold their revels when and where they pleased, and that therefore to ask them “to do nothing unusual” was to leave them exactly as they were, she proceeded to explain, “We mortals,” said she, gaining courage, for the Baron Guy replaced his hand—if he had indeed ever lifted it up—“though we admire you all so

hugely," and now she again hesitated, for she was quite sure Baron Anselmo pointed his truncheon at her—"We mortals," resumed she hurriedly, "are sometimes in much wonder when you condescend to join our mortal parties, and on some occasions and in some states of health we are not strong enough to bear the power of your presence. Your young heir, Almeric"—she turned to look at the worthy baron of that name, whose arm she had examined on the previous night at this same hour, half expecting to see him again without it. But no, there he stood, his right hand playing with the dagger in his belt, and the left hanging down by his side; but then he had certainly turned his head on one side in the act of listening to her. She saw this plainly in the moonlight, and in her surprise and terror again forgot all she had intended to say. She felt her respiration impeded, and a terrible feeling of awe creep over her; some slight noise made her start back—she thought Baron Almeric was drawing forth his dagger—but at this instant a broad stream of light flashed upon the stairs, and as it fell full on the head of the Baron she saw he had raised it again to its customary erect position. With a deep sigh of relief, and a feeling of thankfulness that her watch was now over, Miss Barrymore saw Almeric approaching.

"My dearest darling!" said he, instinctively drawing her arm through his own, "it is now six minutes since you left me; I could not wait longer.

Minutes have seemed like hours to me—come away, love, come away!”

Miss Barrymore had by this time recovered from the sensation of awe that had been overpowering her, and she was now able to respond cheerfully to Almeric’s greeting.

“I am very glad to see you, dear,” said she, clinging to his arm; “you see I am quite safe!”

“But you are in darkness—how is that?—and do come away now?”

“It is not dark, Almeric—no, do not take me away now; accidentally my taper went out before I could light the candles, and as the clock struck I could not return, but——”

“My own darling!” said he in a voice of amazement.

“I do not deserve so much sympathy,” said she with a smile, her courage now entirely resumed by Almeric’s presence, “and I shall not consent to leave the hall until you have seen some of the very same effects that I have admired so much.”

“What can you mean?—to have been in darkness, one would think, must have taken away all effect!”

“It is *not* dark; I want you to realize the charm of the moonlight!—excepting that part of the hall immediately near the doors, the figures are all covered with streams of light just as they were in the day—the glory of the moonbeams is only just less beautiful than the broad glare of the sun! Take the taper back to the corridor, and you

will then see these wonderful lights and shades."

Miss Barrymore, with Almeric by her side, felt brave enough for any number of ghosts, and besides, she had quite forgotten the courtesies of the barons that had so powerfully unnerved her only a few minutes previously; and Almeric himself was so glad his sister's weird watch was over, he was willing to do anything she suggested; and he took the light away from the hall and then returned.

"Now, Almeric, is not this grand?" said Miss Barrymore, seizing his arm, and walking slowly down the centre of the hall. Almeric did not reply. A sensation of awe was quietly creeping over him, for he certainly thought he saw a crowd of people moving about in the darkness near the closed doors! "We see ourselves in the steel mirrors!" said she, anticipating his thoughts as she felt him tighten his grasp on her arm.

"So we do," said he in a glad voice. "It is most curious, Zara—most curious! Were you not alarmed, love, when you first saw yourself reflected there?"

"Oh! never mind that, Almeric, I want you to see how extremely lovely everything is—no, I mean grand!"

Almeric started, and remained standing still, and gazing steadfastly at Baron Guy. He certainly saw him attempting to uncross his hands, and then he said in a sudden tone of gladness,

"Look, Zara, look! the light clouds skudding

over the face of the moon cause such wonderful conceits! I really thought Baron Guy would lift up his hand, until by staring steadfastly at him I saw that sort of apparent movement was only the effect of alternate light and shadow!"

Almeric had discovered the solution to the very phenomenon that had alarmed Miss Barrymore. She said nothing, however, as to the fact of her former terror, and replied,

"I saw the same thing, Almeric; but I stared at him until he was ashamed of doing anything uncourteous to a lady."

"It is marvellously grand," said Almeric. "I wonder we never thought of looking at the old fellows by moonlight, for they come out most bravely!"

"With the doors wide open, Almeric, and that part of the hall flooded with light, as in the daytime, the scene would be superb," said she.

"We will throw them open to-morrow night, Zara; we will have Palmer to attend upon us——"

"I bid you all to our grand fête," said Miss Barrymore, curtsying down to the ground.

"What are you saying, Zara? I wish you would not talk such nonsense; remember Don Giovanni and the statue of the commandant."

"Let me alone. I shall bid them to our fête," said she.

"Then they will come!" said Almeric in a tone of dismay, as he remembered how easily Baron

Almeric left his pedestal and strolled into the Park or seated himself in the library.

"Now, Almeric, do not cross me in my wish to propitiate our ancestors. They have behaved extremely well to me to-night, and I wish to let them see I appreciate their goodness," said she, and then resuming, she turned again to the statues, and curtsying down to the ground, added,

"We shall have a fête before your heir leaves us. You will all grace our grounds; you will stand on your pedestals exactly as you do now. If you alter your, to us, well-known positions, you will alarm us—stand as you do now."

"Come, Zara, come," said Almeric, taking her hand.

"I wish you all a very good night," said she, and turned to leave the hall with Almeric. She could not, she felt herself held back!

"What is the matter?" said he.

"I cannot move," said she, as she pulled her dress vigorously.

Clatter, clatter, with a heavy roll, something fell to the ground.

"Shall I fetch a light, Zara?" said Almeric in whisper.

"Yes, pray do," said she."

And when he returned, the peaked sollarer of Baron Anselmo had caught and detained the long train of her robe, and in pulling it so heartily she had herself touched the arm of the statue, and caused his truncheon to fall. Almeric replaced it,

but when they arrived again at their own room, they both acknowledged that the last incident had quite spoiled the evening.

CHAPTER IX.

“ WISE FEAR BEGETS CARE.”

WE must now return to Prellsthorpe Rectory. Mr. Maynooth had called daily to make inquiries for the Lady Grel Stuart, but he had never been so fortunate as to see her. As Grel was really of an amiable disposition Mrs. Cheetham's acuteness was taxed to discover a reason for this constant refusal to accept any apology. Grel had not taken Mrs. Cheetham into her confidence, and confessed the source of her extreme displeasure towards one who seemed so desirous of making reparation for an involuntary fault. The case seemed enveloped in mystery to all at the Rectory, which Grel's taciturnity on the subject only increased. Brenda's ill-will was engendered, and her suspicions awakened. She supposed Mr. Maynooth had made Grel an offer, and concluded that Grel had refused him on the spot, and also that Grel's idea of her own dignity as the daughter of the late Earl of Prellsthorpe caused her to look down upon a commoner, even though so rich and so handsome as Mr. Maynooth. Brenda felt Grel

never would refuse so good an offer unless her affections were previously engaged, and to whom could Grel be engaged but to her cousin Lord Danby, who would eventually make her a countess. Brenda's treatment of Grel was seldom kind, now it was positively unamiable. But Grel's simplicity never could understand Brenda's jealousy, and now she was at a loss to explain or find a cause for her extreme ill-humour.

Mrs. Cheetham at length took Grel to task on the subject of Mr. Maynooth, and after much entreaty Grel condescended to confess in part the reason for her displeasure towards him. Mrs. Cheetham pointed out that she must have misunderstood him, because he had so plainly told Mr. Cheetham on the day that the accident—if accident it could be called—had happened, *all* that had occurred. Grel became agitated and out of temper upon hearing this, and Mrs. Cheetham hastened to recount his actual words.

“That at first he could not speak from surprise at her heroism ; and next he meant to tell her of his wonder at her courage and thank her, and that then, somehow, she, Lady Grel, had been greatly offended.” After having explained this, Mrs. Cheetham said, “Now, when a gentleman *means* well, however exceptional appearances may have been to us, we should not lightly be offended.”

It was surprising, even to Mrs. Cheetham, to watch the effect of this explanation on Grel. All her amiability of manner and her kindness of feel-

ing seemed to return at once. Mr. Maynooth, then, had not, even to Mr. Cheetham, betrayed her own unconscious familiarity of manner in leaning unasked upon his arm! He seemed, so to speak, to have taken the blame of everything upon himself, and though this was but right and natural to expect, she had so feared *blame*, even in his mind, for her own error, that now she began to feel grateful to him for his silence. She assured Mrs. Cheetham she would try to think more favourably of him, and also try to forgive him, which up to this time she confessed she had not done. She promised also that she would not absent herself when he next made his appearance at the Rectory. And now Grel began to feel a desire to drive to Wolfscrag and spend a long morning with Mistress Nuala Maynooth. Mrs. Cheetham arranged this visit to Grel's satisfaction, and said if the next day were fine she would take her as soon as breakfast was over, and if Mistress Nuala were at home and able to receive her, she would leave her and send the carriage in the evening.

And in their drive to Wolfscrag Mrs. Cheetham and Brenda had all the talk to themselves, and Grel sat silent and thoughtful. She recalled all the facts of the eventful morning that had been the cause of her present drive, and of her introduction to Mistress Nuala Maynooth. And then the words that Mr. Maynooth had used, and that had so offended her, came unbidden to her memory—

“You are the veriest darling in the——”

Her cheeks tingled at the very thought. But she smothered her rising annoyance, and determined not to show any feeling of this nature to the kind old lady she was about to visit.

On their arrival at Wolfscrag Mistress Nuala's carriage was at the door.

“Ah! my dear, I fear this is an inopportune moment,” said Mrs. Cheetham.

But after their cards were sent in, they were admitted immediately, and Mistress Nuala assured Mrs. Cheetham she should be most happy to have the Lady Grel for the whole day, and that if she would allow her, she would herself restore her to the Rectory in the evening. And the Cheethams drove away, and Mistress Nuala and the Lady Grel became very good friends in the first half hour after her arrival.

“I am afraid I am depriving you of a drive to-day?” said Grel; “we saw your carriage at the door as we drove up.”

“No, my dear; if I wish to drive, I think you are sufficiently amiable to be prevailed upon to accompany me.”

“Indeed I shall be delighted,” said Grel, all her natural amiability returning.

“You know the Barrymores well, I think?” said Mistress Nuala.

“I know them—that is to say, I have met them on one or two occasions recently, but I do not know them well. Mrs. Cheetham has promised to

take me to Heraldstowe, now that I am old enough. My cousin Irene says Heraldstowe is more to her taste than any other place in the neighbourhood—even than that magnificent old Abbey.”

“You admire the Abbey most?” said Mistress Nuala.

“I admire the Abbey very much; but then I have never seen Heraldstowe. I long to see it—I am told the park is very lovely, and the views from different points in the drive charming.”

“All this is true; and now, if you really are not already weary with your drive from Prellsthorpe, we will lunch at Heraldstowe to-day.”

“At Heraldstowe?—oh! most enjoyable!” said Grel, some of her old enthusiasm and love of change coming over her.

“Sir Hildedrand was here yesterday, and I promised, if nothing particular occurred to prevent, that I would lunch with him to-day, and I shall be most proud and pleased to take my dear young friend,” said the kind old lady, as she pressed Grel’s hand.

The carriage was ordered for a given hour, and the Lady Grel congratulated herself that by going to Heraldstowe she should certainly be freed from the chance of meeting Mr. Maynooth—a meeting for which she still nursed a certain degree of dread, and that she was happy to put off for an indefinite period, but which, when it should come, she determined to meet as best she could, and try her best to forgive him fully.

This is not the first time that Grel has peeped into the future, and congratulated herself upon either an escape from evil, or a prospect of great good ; her “great expectations” have beforetime met with disappointment. But Grel has not yet learned wisdom. She stepped lightly into the carriage, delighted in the desire to see Heraldstowe, but happier far in the bottom of her heart that *now*, if Mr. Maynooth should chance to call upon his aunt at Wolfscrag, she—Grel—would not see him—would not be at Wolfscrag. Poor Grel.

“You remember we have arranged to make some calls to-day, Fulke?” said Mrs. Hamilton to her son.

“Yes, mother.”

“Heraldstowe, Stowe Vicarage, and the Pines. Can we reach Mitreberis?”

“Mitreberis and Wolfscrag must stand over for another day ; the distance to Heraldstowe alone is quite enough——”

“Yes, Fulke ; but the Thorns and the Fortescues will be all in our way. We will drive immediately after luncheon—order the carriage for half-past two.”

“If you wish, certainly, mother. But the Barrymores are superior people. Sir Hildebrand is quite one of the old school—a picture of an English gentleman of the days that are gone. Punctilious and courteous to a fault, if such a thing can be, and, moreover, hospitable, and glad

to see his friends and neighbours. I would suggest that we lunch at Heraldstowe—order the carriage two hours earlier, and arrive there soon after one.”

“That is, if——”

“I meant, of course, mother, if that hour be convenient to you—if not, tell me so.”

Mrs. Hamilton did not reply immediately, and then Mr. Hamilton added,

“Now, then, mother, will you decide?—time is precious, and I confess I am in a hurry.”

“You are always in a hurry, Fulke. What a fast age this is; all day long people seem as if they could not do what there is to be done half fast enough, and why all this hurry I am sure I often wonder. Often, if I begin to speak, you are out of the room before I can finish my sentence, and what for, pray?”

“Indeed, mother, you may well say what for,” said he, with a smile, as he reseated himself. “I can only say, if I have ever treated you with so little consideration, I am ashamed of myself, and beg you now to accept my apologies. At this moment I await your pleasure, and all other considerations are set aside.”

“Oh! yes, Fulke; and you know I shall feel very happy in the fact that I am keeping you seated there against your will, and for no earthly purpose but that I object to be ‘hurried’ over anything; and when you tell me you are in ‘a hurry’ I forget at once all I have to say.”

"Pray take your time now," said he with a smile, as he sat patiently awaiting Mrs. Hamilton's decision. After a little more conversation on the subject they eventually agreed to drive to Heraldstowe for luncheon.

Mrs. Hamilton was now at the Abbey on a visit to her son, and on this day had, as we have just recorded, arranged to return some of the calls made by the neighbourhood upon her. She was a stranger in the county of Z——, and the drive to Heraldstowe was new to her. When she arrived at the entrance to the Park she was much struck, as she said, by "the silvan charm of the place," in most things a strong contrast to the Abbey and the grounds that surrounded it. The front of Heraldstowe was much more ancient than the Abbey, but it was not that in this early part of the drive the two buildings could be compared with each other, but rather the Park with the Abbey grounds.

In place of the rippling and gurgling trout streams, and of the huge carp stew, there lay the broad and glistening lake. Swans sailed majestically on its waters, and rare birds frequented its banks, in addition to those of a large size if less rare, such as herons and egrets. And again, as they drove on, deer peeped shyly from their coverts, beautiful birds were seen on the wing or perched amid the foliage of the large trees. The ground undulated gently here and there, and the drive seemed to wind in and out and display at every

turn new beauties. Now they skirted the edge of the cedar grove, and the carriage was stopped that Mrs. Hamilton might count the peacocks in their gaudy plumage resting on the broad low branches of the graceful trees—trees that were planted, or rather the seed for which had been brought from Lebanon, by one of the old barons, whose effigy was still to be seen standing in the hall at Heraldstowe, brought by him from Lebanon in the twelfth century, though a writer of the present day says, “Cedars were not introduced into England until the seventeenth century.” The lower branches of the cedars were very large in proportion to the trunks, as is the case with the cedar, and upon these the peacocks were more generally perched. Above, much higher up on the same trees, might be seen smaller birds of brilliant plumage, all contrasting more or less with the rich and dark foliage of the cedars.

Mrs. Hamilton re-entered the carriage, and they drove on. The distant view of the spire of St. Mary on the Knoll struck her as very picturesque, and when the house came abruptly in sight from a bend in the road she expressed her surprise and pleasure, and soon the carriage stopped at the entrance. The hall-door stood wide open. Mrs. Hamilton was now in raptures with the flowery parterre that lay separated from the Park by an invisible fence, but Mr. Hamilton’s attention was taken up by the appearance of two figures standing in the hall at Heraldstowe, and he

heard not a word from his mother. The sun's light fell broadly and glowingly on the tall figure of Mr. Maynooth stooping to the Lady Grel Stuart. Mr. Hamilton could see the expression of his face, which was both earnest and happy. Unfortunately the lady's head was slightly turned aside; he could not read her thoughts as he could those of the gentleman, but Mr. Hamilton felt that he had seen enough to convince himself of a very disagreeable fact, viz.,

"That the Lady Grel Stuart was a forward and ill-bred young woman to allow such familiarity of manner from gentlemen." Mr. Maynooth, stooping to the lady, had extended his right hand, on the broad and open palm of which Grel had evidently placed hers, which was then covered by Mr. Maynooth's left hand in, as Mr. Hamilton thought, "an unpardonably caressing sort of manner," for the very curls of his beard touched her arm.

Stern and exacting in temperament, and having very high ideas of the purity and modesty of the female sex, Mr. Hamilton thought only a positive engagement could sanction such apparently great intimacy, but even this supposition did not avail to quell the anger and annoyance he himself felt as he sat moodily looking on, for when the carriage door was opened he was so engrossed by his own thoughts that Mrs. Hamilton had to arouse him to the fact of their arrival, and tell him "that they must alight." The driving up of the carriage had not

alarmed or disturbed Mr. Maynooth and the Lady Grel; they were so completely absorbed in each other, that eventually the Hamiltons had alighted, and Mrs. Hamilton, taking her son's arm, they had crossed the hall, themselves making no greeting to the lady and gentleman standing there.

Mrs. Hamilton was really unaware of their presence. She had been attracted by the great beauty of the scene as the carriage stopped at the entrance; the statues and fountains, graceful shrubs and gay borders of many-coloured flowers so surpassing anything she had before seen—for the Abbey, though a charming place, and most pleasantly situated, could by no means be compared, in its position, to Heraldstowe; and though the grounds were well laid out, and kept in beautiful order, they had a much more sombre appearance than those at Heraldstowe, and, moreover, were unadorned by statues and fountains. On entering the hall, and unprepared for so spacious a place, so extremely well filled and well fitted up with arms and accoutrements of every kind, partially dazzled by the many-coloured rays streaming through the windows, and half-awed by the, as it seemed, great number of mediæval barons in complete armour, she had passed on almost without raising her eyes, and certainly unconscious, amidst so many inanimate, that any living creatures were standing so picturesquely placed, and grouping in her mind's eye with the types of a past age. Not so Mr. Hamilton. If he did not condescend to

notice either the lady or gentleman, he did not mix them up with the mediæval barons, and with firm step and head erect, with nostrils distended and eyes purposely turned away from so disagreeable a group, he crossed the hall and was lost to the sight of the two delinquents.

Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton were shown into a morning-room, and very soon Almeric and Zara made their appearance, and brought a request from Sir Hildebrand that they would join him at luncheon.

And there we will leave them; Mrs. Hamilton enjoying and appreciating her agreeable friends and their excellent viands, and Mr. Hamilton chewing the bitter cud of disappointment as he became the more convinced of the unladylike conduct of Grel, while we explain the meeting of Mr. Maynooth and her ladyship at Heraldstowe on this particular morning.

CHAPTER X.

“A WISE MAN WILL MAKE TOOLS OF WHAT COMES TO
HAND.”

NOW it was on this very morning that Mistress Nuala Maynooth had driven with the Lady Grel Stuart to Heraldstowe. When they were already seated at luncheon there Lord, Prellsthorpe

and the Lady Irene arrived, they then joined the party in the dining-room, and as Sir Hildebrand said, "were taken into the counsels of the family, with reference to the masked ball soon to be announced."

"If the ladies muster strongly on our side we shall succeed," said he to the Lady Irene, who replied playfully,

"Then success is certain; for all ladies will support your wishes."

The conversation as to whether the evening's amusement should consist of masks and fancy dresses, or be only a plain summer evening party, need not be repeated, it was finally settled that it should be as gay and gorgeous as dress and jewellery could make it, and that all should be masked—except Sir Hildebrand and Mistress Nuala Maynooth—until supper. One thing should be noted, that on collecting votes, for or against masks, the Lady Grel declined to say anything on either side, alleging "that she did not understand."

"You will graciously give your vote to some gentleman who is more learned than yourself on these matters," said the Earl.

"You shall have it, dear uncle," said she.

"Oh! no, no, Grel," said he, laughing, "I am not young enough to have much to do with these revels. I shall come and look on, but you must be better attended. Shall I take it to D.?"

"Thanks, no! Perhaps——"

"You would rather have the pleasure of giving it to him yourself!—well, be it so."

"But, Grel, you ought to learn to give an opinion for yourself," said Irene; "this is so trifling a thing, just to say yes or no to masks and fancy dresses."

Irene was desirous of the display in gorgeous attire, and also of the amusement of masks, and therefore wishful to get as many "ayes" as possible; but Grel was really ignorant of what was intended to be done. She would not be terrified from her position by Irene's rather sharp voice and dictatorial manner, and replied therefore,

"This is a trifling thing to you, Irene, but to me it is no trifle. I do not understand masks, and I never saw a fancy dress in my life. When I have had your experience I will try to imitate your excellent example, until then allow me to keep in the shade."

This was a long speech for Grel. Zara Barrymore admired her spirit, Almeric thought my Lady Irene had met her match, and Sir Hildebrand said,

"My Lady Pearl, you are right. First get experience, then act upon it."

But Irene felt angry, angry that Grel should dare to reply to her in that way.

"There were some excellent dresses for such occasions in a large chest in the south wing, Zara," said Mistress Nuala Maynooth, by way of changing the subject from "ayes" and "noes" to some-

thing more interesting. "Do you know what has become of them?"

"They are still there," replied Miss Barrymore, "and, singularly enough, I had determined to have them taken out to air during this very hot and dry weather."

"I should like to see them," said Mistress Nuala, "will you allow me to ask your maid to attend me with the keys, and assist me in examining them?"

"Certainly; pray do as you please——"

"And as I know my way about the house," said Mistress Nuala, with a little laugh, "you will perhaps allow me to leave the table, and take my young friend with me."

To this Miss Barrymore consented, but the Lady Irene said,

"And may not I accompany Grel and see these lovely costumes?"

Now Mistress Nuala had wished to take her young friend with her because she was her own peculiar visitor for that day; and though perfectly well known to the Barrymores, and a very near relative of the earl and his daughter, she felt that she would rather not leave so shy a young lady to fight her own battles alone. But she had no wish for the company of the Lady Irene; and besides *she* was quite able to "fight her own battles" at any time, and moreover, was very likely always to conquer. Mistress Nuala replied therefore in a kind tone,

"No. I am afraid you will think me very un-

courteous, but if I show you the costumes we intend to wear what will be the use of masks? How shall we be in disguise? It will take away the principal part of the evening's amusement to know each other's resources."

The Lady Irene smiled, and appeared contented with this explanation, and Mistress Nuala turned to leave the room. Grel was standing, waiting to go with her, and she then resumed,

"And I am afraid, my dear, my harshness and discourtesy must extend even to you. I must not allow you to see our store of costumes; I had not thought of that, though I wish to have the pleasure of your company."

Nevertheless the ladies left the room together, and Grel said,

"Shall I shut my eyes, dear madam? Or what shall I do?"

And then, as they re-entered the hall to ascend the grand staircase, she said without waiting for a reply,

"What splendid suits of armour!—what a magnificent hall! Ah! I no longer wonder at Irene's enthusiasm on the subject of Heraldstowe, and the stained glass, and——"

"There is a more superb collection of ancient and curious arms, and of suits of mail and chain armour in this house," said Mistress Nuala, breaking in upon the earnestness of her young friend, "than anywhere else in the kingdom, if we except the Tower of London."

The Lady Grel stood silently rapt in admiration—in admiration not only of knights in armour and steel mirrors, and antique swords and weapons in general, but also of the wonderfully many-coloured hues dancing here and there and streaming in through the large windows, the effect of which had so powerfully charmed Miss Barrymore on a previous occasion.

“Perhaps, my dear, you would like to examine these gentlemen at your ease?—you are not likely to be intruded upon, and I know of no other hall in England containing treasures better worthy your attention.”

“I have not words to tell you what I feel,” said Grel.

“This, my dear, is Sigismund Mandeville Barry-Barrymore; he died at the feet of King Richard. The Barrymores tell long stories of his glorious death; you must ask Sir Hildebrand, he is always delighted to sound the praises of his illustrious ancestors. I think Sigismund gave his life to save King Richard, but I am not very clear on the subject. That is Baron Guy Montague Barry-Barrymore leaning on his long sword. That is Conradin with the harp; he was a troubadour as well as a warrior. But now, my dear, I am come to the extent of my learning; I am not so clever as the Barrymores; I cannot remember long pedigrees, and tell tales of my ancestors and their gallant deeds in the Holy Land.

When you are tired of amusing yourself with

these worthy gentlemen, come straight up the different flights of stairs till you see me at the far end of a long gallery, or return to the party in the dining-room, as you please."

"I shall never tire of this wonderful hall!" said she enthusiastically, "and I will stay here until you return."

"Very well, my dear; I am sure you will find enough to amuse you if you admire such things," and the Lady Grel was left alone.

To a contemplative mind, such as hers, few scenes could have given her more pleasure. She saw with amazement the different kinds of armour on the ten statues standing in the hall, but she was quite unlearned as to the kind or quality. She knew "chain armour" from "russet armour," and she saw some suits were "chased and engraved," some "embossed." There were more than one "suit of splints," but she did not know that "splint" was the distinguishing term. The one that most arrested her attention was a fine specimen, "black, with gilt engraving, forming chequers with trophies or badges within them." Then she watched the dancing of the sun's rays, and the fantastic effects caused by the clouds in dimming their brightness for the moment, and by dispersing one charm producing another.

And she had been some time alone enjoying the scene in delighted wonder, when a hasty step suddenly broke in upon her reverie and entered the hall. Turning to greet the intruder upon her

pleasure, she saw the very gentleman she least wished to see again even—Mr. Maynooth!

It was odd that Grel had congratulated herself on the drive to Heraldstowe with Mistress Nuala Maynooth, because this was so sure to prevent the chance of any meeting between her and Mr. Maynooth; and now here he had arrived, and not only had he arrived, but again she met him alone!

The Lady Grel Stuart and Mr. Maynooth stood for a second or two gazing at each other. Then—we are ashamed to chronicle the fact—the lady turned her back on the gentleman with an unpremeditated intention of making her escape.

“Oh! stay—stay one moment!” said he entreatingly.

And in that moment of time Grel had reflected on the unseemly rudeness of her behaviour, and also had recalled the promise given to Mrs. Cheetham “that she would not deny herself to Mr. Maynooth,” and again impulsively she turned to correct her error, and with a smile she raised her eyes to his. Afterwards, in recalling this scene, she acknowledged to herself that she never had seen so tall a gentleman—it almost hurt her neck to throw her head sufficiently back to meet his eyes. He had instinctively followed her retreating footsteps, and when she suddenly stopped and turned her head, Mr. Maynooth was so close upon her as to again excite in her a feeling of indignation at this startling, though she soon became convinced, accidental proximity.

But he, looking down upon her from the depths of his large blue eyes, retreated as soon as she turned, and, stooping from his colossal height, at once expressed a hope "that she no longer suffered from his former heedlessness."

Grel smiled a hearty smile as she assured him her hand had quite recovered. She raised it as she spoke, and he extended his right hand, and opened wide the palm as he said,

"Show me—graciously condescend to show me that you can for the future trust me to be more considerate."

She understood him almost before he had completed the sentence, and placed her hand upon his as she replied, in those same mellifluous tones Mr. Maynooth so well remembered,

"I am quite sure you did not mean to hurt me," Grel meant to be very gracious, and this intention only added to the charm of her voice. He dropped his hat, gloves, and whip on the floor of the hall, and covering her extended hand with the palm of his left hand, he stooped lower as he said,

"Never have I met with such heroism—such true heroism in a lady! Women in general scream if a fly alights on their fingers, but you—"

Grel laughed at the idea of any one screaming at the sight of a fly.

"But you," resumed Mr. Maynooth, "while in actual pain from my thoughtlessness, remembered your dog and——"

It was during these few moments that Mr.

Hamilton had—while seated in his carriage, and unknown to the pair—so securely watched them.

“Now, one word to tell me I am forgiven,” said Mr. Maynooth.

“Yes, yes, say no more. It is I who must thank you for the extreme solicitude you have shown for my recovery.”

“I have never known such anxiety. But you were examining these old heroes—do you know them?”

“This is my first appearance at Heraldstowe. I came with Mistress Nuala Maynooth,” said Grel.

“They are worthy your notice, I assure you; allow me to be your guide, I know these barons well. Pray lean on my arm,” added he, as he gently liberated her hand and placed it on his arm, “I so long to prove that I can redeem myself in your good opinion—ah! good morning!”

The Hamiltons had passed through the hall, but no notice was taken of Mr. Maynooth’s courteous salutation.

“Who were they?” said the Lady Grel.

“Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton. I had not heard the carriage stop,” added he, as turning to the open doors of the hall he saw Mr. Hamilton’s coachman gently walking his horses round the drive at the entrance.

He did not observe that the Lady Grel changed colour at the mention of Mr. Hamilton’s name, nor could he possibly know that however eager she

had been to see the statues and hear all he could tell her on the subject of the armour and trophies in the hall but one moment previously, that now she wished she had not left the luncheon table!—for then she would have had the pleasure of hearing Mr. Hamilton talk, of watching his fine countenance; and also she would have had an opportunity of being introduced to Mrs. Hamilton.

Mr. Maynooth was unconscious of this change in the lady's sentiments, and very learnedly told her much she did not understand, and more that she did not hear.

Grel was foolishly allowing her thoughts to play truant in Mr. Hamilton's favour, while Mr. Hamilton himself was determining in his own mind never to think of her again, excepting only as a very ill-bred young lady, whose unmaidenly conduct had placed her beyond the pale of his regard, and rendered her unfit for the position of Mistress of Prellsthorpe Abbey! But then as Grel had no clue to this determination on the part of Mr. Hamilton, she did not feel herself to blame in still making an idol of him, and setting his image upon a shrine for her own private worship.

Now Mr. Maynooth was so happy in the present fact that the Lady Grel was actually leaning on his arm, that she had forgiven him, that the pain from the rings cutting into the flesh had subsided, and her hand recovered its fair proportions, that his heart and his fancy aided by his great learning and large experiences of life, expanded in burning

words of chivalric deeds as he pointed out now this warrior, now that, and told of the battles of former days! Anselmo, Thibault, Lancelot, and Adelbert all came in for their share in his enthusiasm and his erudition. But the lady unfortunately "listened with a closed ear." To Mr. Maynooth, it is true, she appeared to listen to his learned recitals and long stories, and to gaze upon this baron and that. But her eyes saw not, her ears heard not; Grel's fancy had flown off to Mr. Hamilton!

At length Mr. Maynooth began to recite one of the lays of the Troubadour Conrad, and stooping to the lady he said,

"The lady's eyes were violets,
While Conrad's were forget-me-nots."

Something about "violets" and "forget-me-nots" had certainly pressed through the closed doors of the organs of sound, and Grel's reverie on the subject of Mr. Hamilton was interrupted. She raised her eyes to the Baron Conrad's lute, as pointed out to her by Mr. Maynooth, and saw ride quickly up to the entrance her cousin Lord Danby.

In the twinkling of an eye Lord Danby had alighted, and left his horse in the hands of his attendant.

Grel made no exclamation, but her change of colour on Lord Danby's entrance was not on this occasion, lost on Mr. Maynooth.

"So, Grel, love, you are not afraid of spiders?"

said Lord Danby, extending his hand. "Tell me, is he 'spinning a thought?' I see he is walking with and talking to 'an angel!'"

"I do not understand you, D.," said Grel.

The customary greetings passed between the two gentlemen, and then Lord Danby turned again to Grel, and said,

"Then if you do not comprehend, I will repeat to you two lines of Nathaniel Lee,

'I've seen an unscrewed spider spin a thought,
And walk away upon the wings of angels,'

and they are so applicable to you and Maynooth I could not fail of recalling them."

"I do not like spiders, D., you know that is one of my weaknesses," said Grel; but she did not understand her cousin.

"Very honest, love, always be honest, Grel; Maynooth understands you do not like him!"

Mr. Maynooth took no notice, Lady Grel blushed a rosy blush of indignation at this rude speech, and then said by way of changing the subject,

"My uncle and Irene are here."

"They are now at luncheon," said Mr. Maynooth.

"And why, then, are not you with them, Grel? Come, come with me," said Lord Danby, taking her hand.

"I have lunched," said she, unconsciously clinging to Mr. Maynooth's arm, "and the Hamiltons are there." She felt a natural dread of her cousin's

compelling her to do something disagreeable, and therefore felt Mr. Maynooth a protection.

But he, when she tightened her grasp on his arm, felt his heart bump in uncontrolled happiness against his side. His impulse was to take hold of the little hand so confidently clinging to him for protection, and assure her by a gentle pressure of it that she was safe. But remembering the errors of a former occasion, he now became apparently as blind and deaf to the lady's mute entreaty for protection as she had just been to his learning.

"I am with Mistress Nuala Maynooth, D.," said Grel with an intention of explaining to him, but, as usual, he chose to misunderstand, for when Grel added, "And I go with her to Wolfscrag," he turned to Mr. Maynooth and said,

"Then I am to infer you have changed your name?"

"Oh! no," said Mr. Maynooth with a smile. "My aunt brought the lady here, and I am trying to enlighten her as to the wonderful lives of these mediæval worthies."

"Mistress Nuala is gone to look out some dresses for a mask," said Grel.

"A mask! What at Mitreberis or Wolfscrag?" said Lord Danby, addressing Mr. Maynooth; but as he knew nothing on the subject of the mask, he turned to Grel, who said,

"Sir Hildebrand means to have a mask here, and Irene and Miss Barrymore are discussing it, and making arrangements. I came away to amuse

myself with the armour because I did not understand about the mask, and my opinion was of no value."

"Nor do I understand," said Lord Danby; "your report of such gay doings at Heraldstowe quite mystifies me. But I will go on and try to learn more on so excellent a subject." He passed through the hall as he spoke, and Mr. Maynooth said,

"Sir Hildebrand will have a mask here, do you say?"

"Yes, they were talking very learnedly when I left the dining-room; but, as I have said, I came away because I do not understand such things, and had no opinion to give. You do, I daresay?" and she looked up at him inquiringly.

"A masked ball, probably, or a masque—do you know which?" said he.

"I do not even know the difference."

Mr. Maynooth explained, but in his own mind wondered that one of the Lady Grel's rank knew so little of the usages of society.

"Shall I tell you any more about these old fellows, or have I tired you?" said he.

Grel was prevented from replying by the appearance of Mistress Nuala.

"Raymond! and how came you here?" said she. Her surprise was as great as Grel's, for she too had calculated that by their drive to Heraldstowe a meeting with Mr. Maynooth was little likely to happen.

"I rode, dear aunt," said he quietly, and not in the least understanding her thoughts.

"Have you made yourself useful to my friend Lady Grel? She is a stranger at Heraldstowe, and you are learned in the details of armour and——"

"Oh! no, aunt, I am not learned," said he interrupting.

"The Hamiltons are gone in to luncheon, and also my cousin Lord Danby," said Grel to Mistress Nuala.

"Indeed! then there is a goodly party; we will join them, my dear. I have turned out the dresses, and Zara and I shall have plenty of choice; but let us go and give our votes, or have you given yours already into the hands of your cousin?"

"No, indeed, I had forgotten it. But," said she, dreading to have anything to do with Lord Danby, and turning to Mr. Maynooth, "if you will allow me to leave my vote with you, I am sure I shall feel myself extremely well represented."

Mr. Maynooth expressed himself happy to be of any service, but as he did not understand the nature of the commission that had been assigned to him, Mistress Nuala explained.

Grel was glad that at last all the talk was over, and they turned their steps to join the party in the dining-room. She longed to see Mr. Hamilton again, and had set her heart upon being made

known to Mrs. Hamilton. But she was again the sport of circumstances, and again doomed to disappointment. As soon as Mistress Nuala and herself with Mr. Maynooth entered the dining-room the Hamiltons arose to take leave. Grel was not introduced to Mrs. Hamilton, and Mr. Hamilton contrived to repress a great deal of the enthusiasm she felt in his favour by a very cold bow as he passed her on leaving the room.

CHAPTER XI.

“HAPPY IS THE WOOING THAT IS NOT LONG IN DOING.”

NOW at Mitreberris Miss Maynooth sat alone, waiting the entrance of her brother in the drawing-room previously to the announcement of dinner. When he at length made his appearance he walked up and down the room in apparently a very happy frame of mind.

“What has happened, Raymond?” said Miss Maynooth.

“I am going to be married to the most charming woman in the world!” said he enthusiastically.

“You! this is news indeed! You have lost no time since you fell in love. I quite congratulate you on your position. For your sake, dear Raymond, I am very glad,” and Yolande arose and offered her hand to her brother, which he accepted

and retained while he stooped and kissed her forehead.

"I need not ask who is the fortunate lady, for of course she is the Lady Grel Stuart?"

"She is such a darling, Yolande, and it is a comfort to me that you and Aunt Nuala like her."

"But how have you brought so great an event to pass, Raymond, and in so very short a time, and especially after your, as you called it, 'bearish behaviour' to her in the Park?"

"Oh! never mind all that. I have her vote for the masked ball."

"Masked ball, Raymond? Where is that to be?"

"At Heraldstowe. Sir Hildebrand is getting up a farewell fête before Almeric goes abroad."

"What an odd thing!—a masked ball!"

"Never mind the oddness, Yolande. I know no particulars except that we are all to have cards, and it is not to be a large party. And it is for this occasion that I have her vote, the darling! She gave it me in the prettiest manner. I wish you had seen her, Yolande, but I was wary—wary I assure you."

"Yes, Raymond?" said Miss Maynooth inquiringly.

"I could have kissed her on the spot, she *did* look so tempting. And though I do not think it fair of a lovely creature like Grel to tempt me so terribly, yet I stood my ground. I remained, to all appearance, very quiet and cool and collected,

and I did not even press her hand. But—oh! Yolande, if ever a man had to exercise a powerful restraint upon his own impulses, and exert a sturdy control over his own will, I was in that plight at that moment. And, thank God! I succeeded. She really thought I was indeed the quiet and meek looking lamb I affected to be. She is a wonder of a woman!—a perfect wonder! And I do think that with very ordinary skill on my part, I shall succeed in making her think I am only another huge sort of dog like her own famous Bauer, and then she may fall to caressing me, Yolande, as she does him!”

“And what will you do then, Raymond?”

Dinner was announced at this auspicious moment, and we lost Mr. Maynooth’s reply. He conducted his sister to her place at the head of the table, and then said,

“Aunt Nuala is as full of this fête as the Barrymores.”

“Dear aunt! Yes, Raymond, she always enjoys society, though she stays so much at home, which seems unaccountable. But now, if she would personate a gipsy, and tell our fortunes, she would make quite a sensation. I have often known her make such happy hits!”

“Happy hits!” she must be primed for the occasion. I will get her up in all that I intend shall happen, and then she can hit right and left if she likes.”

When the attendants at length left the room,

and wine and fruits were on the table, Mr. Maynooth again returned to his interview with the Lady Grel.

"I used to think the companionship of women more fit for angels than for men."

"Why, of course, Raymond; you must expect a woman to have a good deal of an angel in her, and of course much more than can ever be expected to appear in a man."

"You are taking a woman's view of the position, and consequently out of perspective. I shall explain, and I am satisfied with my own opinion. I did not mean to say that all women are angels, for that I do not think, nor that there are no true women in the world. I thank God of these latter there are a few to be met with here and there. And now listen, Yolande, and tell me if I do not describe to you 'a true woman' and a most lovable darling. A woman who cannot be smoked out night or day shows a strong leaning to man's infirmities, and all 'true women' have that gift. A woman who will intrude herself into your thoughts all day long, in your walks or elsewhere must have a strong regard for a man, all 'true women' have that gift. A woman who sets your pulses throbbing every time you hear the sound of her voice, must have a great pleasure in speaking to you, and nobody can deny that all 'true women' are fond of talking. A woman who gives you her vote because she herself is ignorant shows a considerable reliance on a man's judgment, all 'true

women' have that gift also. And a woman who clings to a man for protection shows herself in her true colours, is 'a true woman,' and deserves—deserves did I say? It is impossible, Yolande, accurately to determine in words what such a woman deserves; but this I may admit to you, as my sister, and the one to whom I confess many things unknown to others, to you I may admit that I only restrained myself from kissing this 'true woman' who so clung to me, from a wish to reward her more effectually at some future time."

Mr. Maynooth ceased speaking and raised his glass to his lips, while Yolande said in a tone of doubt,

"But all these phases of 'true women' are but the creations of your own imagination."

"Could I create so 'true a woman' if there were no type in the Lady Grel?"

"Perhaps not, Raymond, I am not able to say; but all your premises are wrong."

"Then let them remain so, Yolande; they are very pleasurable to me. Let me give you some more wine," said Mr. Maynooth, as he refilled his own glass and then resumed, "But I had almost forgotten to tell you, in fact I have been so carried away by the heat of the argument, I do not marvel that other things are pushed from my memory—I had forgotten to tell you Aunt Nuala wants us to dine with her to-morrow. And then again, Yolande, I have not told you 'the darling Grel' was taken to Heraldstowe by my aunt. I

did not dare to ask if she be on a visit at Wolfscrag, though I think it probable Aunt Nuala has asked us on purpose because Grel is staying with her."

"I disagree with you, Raymond. In the first place, Lady Grel is not on a visit with my aunt, she is only gone for the day; and in the second Aunt Nuala would not ask you to meet her if she were staying at Wolfscrag."

"And why not, Yolande?"

Miss Maynooth did not see it necessary to repeat to her brother the conversation she had had on this subject with Mistress Nuala, and his query remained unanswered.

"I feel sure my aunt likes Grel, and I—heavens how I do love her!"

"You really are becoming quite absurd, Raymond!—you, who were formerly so sensible."

"I had not—until now—the smallest idea of the enjoyment one has in committing absurdities," said he; "if you mean to tell me I am in that predicament now, pray be wise and follow my example; I am as happy as a king who has no queen can hope to be; but then I am happy in the anticipation of the enjoyable future!"

CHAPTER XII.

“DO AND UNDO THE DAY IS LONG ENOUGH.”

DR. QUINN, in spite of his professional good-sense, had at this stage in our story become much annoyed with several arrangements at Heraldstowe he thought inimical to Almeric's future health. By some means or other Almeric had persuaded Sir Hildebrand that it was quite necessary—if the fête was to be expected to go off well—that it was necessary to fix the evening about the full of the moon. As the moon had only just passed the full it followed, as a matter of course, that nearly a month would elapse ere the maskers could assemble. Dr. Quinn was not propitiated by receiving a card for the fête, indeed he inwardly resolved that he would refuse. He took Miss Barrymore aside and talked most seriously on the probable results of this delay. Miss Barrymore on her part, assured him she had acted for the best. She had obeyed his strict orders not to cross Almeric's will.

“His opinions; I meant you to understand it would be wiser not to contradict him in conversation. Let him fancy his own ideas on any subject correct.”

“But he positively would not go away unless I got up this party for him, and what can I do?” said she.

“Get it together in a day or two, and not be getting up masked balls while your brother is losing—” he was going to say “losing his senses,” but Dr. Quinn’s professional caution came to his rescue, and he only added, “losing time!”

Almeric has everything his own way, I do assure you,” said Miss Barrymore. “He it is who has influenced grandpapa to have masks, and he it is who says only in the full moon can the fête be thoroughly enjoyed.”

Dr. Quinn shook his head, as he always did when he considered himself ill-used, and Miss Barrymore resumed,

“I think upon the whole, Almeric is better. I cannot find any subject of conversation disturb him. He never seems to me to get upon a topic that he would wish to change, or that is painful to him, and he always expresses himself clearly and well, I may even say learnedly.”

Dr. Quinn bowed his head in deference to Miss Barrymore’s opinion, but he thought,

“How little you know about the matter! If I had the handling of him I would soon find out what is on his mind.”

And perhaps he was right in his judgment, for there were some subjects that always excited Almeric, of which Miss Barrymore had never made mention to Dr. Quinn.

She knew that when the conversation turned upon the suits of armour standing in the hall, or in different parts of the house, and which she and he

spoke of as the actual men who had lived so many hundreds of years previously without the most remote allusion to so inanimate a thing as armour—she knew that Almeric was always greatly interested, often excited, but *never* wishful to change the subject. Acting under Dr. Quinn's directions, and observing her brother through his advice, Miss Barrymore had failed to discover that this was one subject of annoyance, or, at least, of mystification to Almeric. And Dr. Quinn had himself so fully explained to her that Almeric's illness was produced by her own carelessness in leaving open the cabinet doors, that this also assisted in convincing her that their ancestors, or their ghosts, did not disturb him. These excellent people—the ghosts of their ancestors—had been a trouble to Miss Barrymore ever since that memorable time when Baron Almeric had dropped his arm at night and replaced it in the morning! She herself frequently watched for the re-appearance of the coloured lights on the marble statues on the lawns—but she did not suspect Almeric of a similar employment. It is almost needless to add that the lights never reappeared.

Almeric himself would not see Dr. Quinn when he could by any chance escape a conference. But on this occasion—unknowing that Dr. Quinn was with his sister—he came hastily in, and “rushed into the very jaws of the lion,” as he afterwards said to Miss Barrymore.

“Oh! good morning! I beg your pardon, I will

not interrupt your conference with Zara," said he to Dr. Quinn. "But I want her opinion for one moment—Zara, dear, just see is this from Prellsthorpe?"

And he gave her a letter.

"From the Hamiltons," said she; "an invitation for dinner."

"Ah! for which day?" said Almeric; "Hamilton is coming out splendidly."

"For Thursday next week. I had better refuse," said she.

"Oh! nonsense. This is Hamilton's first attempt at sociability. No, we must not refuse, must we, Dr. Quinn?" said Almeric.

Dr. Quinn assured Almeric he had no opinion to give on so unimportant a subject. He soon afterwards took leave, having impressed upon Miss Barrymore the fact that her want of attention to his orders, with reference to her brother, would in all probability be the cause of a much more serious illness overtaking him.

Sir Hildebrand declined the invitation for himself to Prellsthorpe Abbey, but Almeric and Zara accepted it.

Most of the party who entered the spacious drawing-room of the Abbey on the day appointed for the dinner-party were surprised at the group assembled there.

Mr. Hamilton, and Mrs. Hamilton, his mother, were by this time well known to the surrounding neighbourhood; but the lady whom Mrs. Hamilton

introduced as "my daughter, Mrs. Fulke Hamilton," was a stranger to all.

How quickly each visitor's mind ran off upon the scandals that had so long been whispered of Prellsthorpe Abbey and its aristocratic owner. This, then, was "the shut up wife, poor thing!" for Mr. Hamilton's name was "Fulke." "My daughter" must mean "my son's wife." When Mr. Hamilton himself spoke to this stranger lady, he addressed her by her christian name "Achsa," and she always called him "Fulke." Sara Thorn made a note on the tablets of her memory to the purport "that she would ask Sir Hildebrand—so learned on the subject—for the meaning of "Achsa" and "Fulke." She thought the two names might probably be as curious in their interpretation as the two owners of them were apparently distinct from any other two.

But when dinner was announced Mrs. Fulke Hamilton did not take upon herself the marshalling of her guests; that honour fell upon Mrs. Hamilton. Here were present all our old friends. The Fortescues—not Mrs. Fortescue, she seldom dined from home—the Barrymores, the Thorns, the Maynooths, the Cheethams and Lady Grel, and the Earl of Prellsthorpe, Lord Danby and Irene.

Dinners are much the same everywhere; and we will leave the magnificent service of plate, the heirloom engraved glass, the more brilliant jewelled glass, the well-served courses, and the costly wines to the imagination of the reader. The hum of the

dinner in no way differed from the ordinary well-bred sound that pervades the atmosphere of a dinner, and each person appeared to be enjoying him or herself in the legitimate mode on such occasions.

Lady Irene was taken by Mr. Hamilton and placed by his side. And in some sort, to make up for our remissness in not giving a description of the dinner, we will chronicle some of the thoughts of the guests, and record some of the conversations. To begin with the lady so favoured by the master of the feast as to be placed by his side, it may be recorded—that she was watching her cousin Grel with malicious eyes. No, we do her ladyship injustice, with mild-looking and dove-like eyes, but with envious feelings in her heart. She saw that her late admirer Mr. Maynooth was—as Miss Thorn had said when they dined together at Landeswold—greatly attracted by Grel. She saw Grel smile and acknowledge his courteous notice. She saw more—she saw that even the aristocratic gentleman by her side—even Mr. Hamilton's looks were often turned to Grel. Then she fell to wondering again who the lady could be who was placed by his side. Irene determined she could *not* be his wife, because she had not marshalled the guests, did not take the head of the table, and was placed by Captain Fortescue, who took her in to dinner, at the left hand of Mr. Hamilton. No, Irene decreed she could not be his wife. Then could she be his sister? “My

daughter, Mrs. Fulke Hamilton." What could such strange words mean? Irene was mystified. She made up her mind that Mr. Hamilton was certainly looking out for a wife, and that she herself was a great magnet to him, but that somehow or other Grel occasionally took off his attention. This was almost more of a mystery to Irene than "Mrs. Fulke Hamilton." What was there in Grel that could by any possibility allure any man? Envy and jealousy are subtle poisons that destroy their victims without mercy.

Sara Thorn was not tortured as was the Lady Irene. Sara was very happy. She was again seated by Lord Danby, who was amusing himself at her expense. But Sara was inexperienced, and did not discover this; and besides, she had her share of the "vanity" said to be inherent in female nature, but then "vanity," unlike envy and jealousy, which destroy while they wound, harms none but its own possessor. To her great delight her companion still further "deduced" names and titles he thought suitable for her. She was known to most of her friends as "Miss Rose," and to some as "York and Lancaster," but to Lord Danby Sara had now become "Queen York."

It is a positive fact that Sara liked Lord Danby's attentions at this epoch in their intimacy, but she did *not* plume herself upon the probable result of so much consideration from him beyond the enjoyment of the present hour. She herself was at no loss to understand how she had acquired her pre-

sent title, "Queen York." She remembered the "union of the Roses" came from the marriage of Elizabeth of York with Henry VII. But those of her friends who were unfamiliar with the names Lord Danby had previously honoured her with, had no clue to this latter title.

"Has Maynooth told you *circa* the squirrels?" said he.

"No. I know nothing on the subject of squirrels," said she.

"Ah! true; they do not live in your day," said Lord Danby.

Sara repented speaking the truth so simply. In her own mind she acknowledged that she was ignorant of the natural history of the squirrel; but then to confess this to Lord Danby was to place herself in an uncomfortable position, and as we have recorded, "Sara repented that she had spoken the truth." Lord Danby, meanwhile, looked at Sara with a sort of deliberate survey before he again spoke, and then he said,

"I remember, you were dull at that dinner at Landeswold. Are you always dull at dinner? You require wine;" and then, turning to an attendant, he added: "Wine to Queen York."

"Yes, my lord," said the man, moving uneasily from one foot to another, and looking round the table.

"Now, attend," said Lord Danby to the man—"wine to Queen York."

"Yes, my lord," said the man. And then,

stooping, and speaking in a low voice, he added, "But, my lord, I do not know which lady you mean."

"If you give wine to the ladies all round the table you will eventually find Queen York."

And the man went on his, to him, strange errand.

"No wine," said Miss Barrymore.

"Lord Danby, madam," whispered the attendant, and Miss Barrymore allowed her glass to be filled.

"None," said Mrs. Fulke Hamilton.

"Lord Danby, madam," again whispered the indefatigable attendant.

And in this manner each lady's glass was filled with wine, and each one's attention turned upon Lord Danby for the time being. Meanwhile Lord Danby said to Sara,

"I am sorry you are compelled to remain so long in this state of dullness; you may perceive the man is walking all round the table to try and discover 'Queen York.'"

"I see no marvel in that," said Sara.

"But I do. I should know a queen the moment she caught my eye."

"But you do not expect an attendant to possess your discrimination, do you?" said Sara.

"If he had, you would not wait so long for wine."

"Thanks, no wine," said she.

"Hopelessly dull—I assure you you will become

hopelessly dull without wine. Ah ! all right now ; your glass is filled. Drink off the wine, and I will begin again circa the squirrels."

Sara sipped her wine, and Lord Danby expatiated on the benefit, as a tonic, of good wine to the constitution. But the ladies all round the table sat looking at Lord Danby, and inwardly wondering why he recalled a custom out of use, and compelled them to have wine against their own inclinations, and then gave all his attention to Sara Thorn ! Some thought he had forgotten, some thought him rude ; but Irene inwardly rejoiced at his decided notice of Miss Thorn, because Brenda Cheetham could not hide her discomfort.

"Now I shall begin again," said he. "Has Maynooth told you circa the squirrels ?"

"No," said Sara, half dreading the sort of catechising that would follow.

"Do you know how many kinds of squirrels there are in the world ?" said Lord Danby.

Assuredly Sara Thorn did not. She dreaded being called "dull" by Lord Danby, and evading the question, replied with some spirit,

"If I did I would hide my knowledge, for the sake of having your description."

"There is more to be said in favour of wine than some people think."

Sara would have said, impulsively, "Is there ?" with an inanimate, don't-care sort of expression, for she very much disliked this sort of questioning ;

but she stopped in time, and substituted, "I am learning its value by experience."

"Ah! I knew you were an apt scholar—I knew you ought not to be dull. Now why are you sometimes dull?"

"When my thoughts are so mighty, they overpower my tongue."

"Queen York, I toast you," said Lord Danby, as he raised his glass to his lips, and drained it off.

The ladies—many of them—saw this, and some wondered if Lord Danby were now in love with Miss Thorn.

"And once again, circa the squirrels," said he, as he replaced his glass. "The history of the squirrel's egg you know well. It is published by an undoubted authority—Murray, of Albemarle Street. We have done with that, because it is true. You perceive it is comparatively easy to 'set aside' truth, for no one believes that statement; but Maynooth is most amusing; he half killed with laughter Irene and me the other day; he says he saw somewhere 'two tiny striped squirrels not larger than a common mouse.*' Now if he had said not larger than a *fly*, we might have placed that account by the side of the squirrel's egg, and sent it to the same house for publication."

"I had no idea that the earth held anything so

* See Note 1.

very wonderful as a squirrel small as a mouse," said Sara in astonishment.

"Nor had I—nor have I; undoubtedly it is bosh. But when a man shoots with a long bow he might as well say a fly as a mouse."

"It is not true?—do you mean Mr. Maynooth would say what is not true?" said Sara.

"Not true, Queen York!—why, how can there be any truth in such statements? My astonishment is that so sensible a man should amuse himself by uttering such barefaced lies—for really they come under that head. But again, he also saw a remarkably large squirrel peculiar to Bidi—now where is Bidi?"

"In the Island of Borneo," said Sara.

"Ah! well up in geography. I candidly confess I only know the Azores and the Bahamas."

"Have you been to those islands?"

"Queen York! Hopelessly dull! I? I been to the Azores, and to the—why look at me, Queen York, do I look like a man who delights in people with black skins?"

"But you say you know the Azores and the Bahamas."

"Ah! I know *the names* of those places or continents or islands, as being far away from England; that is really all I know about them, except that their inhabitants are famous for their black skins! Now Maynooth has been still further away from England, among the copper and gold and silver people, among the blacks, the tawneys, and

the purples. It would surprise an *un*-educated man to hear Maynooth talk; and he might, in his ignorance, credit what he hears."

"And you say he saw a large squirrel at Bidi? in opposition to that the size of 'a fly,' I suppose this then is as large as an elephant!"

"Queen York, you are perfect!" then turning to an attendant, he added, "Wine to Queen York."

"None, thanks," said Sara courteously.

"Nonsense, you must not slip from your pedestal now! But to return to the squirrel at Bidi, it is, as you say, as large as an elephant, and it has——"*

"As large as an elephant!—impossible," said Sara.

"Then why did you assure me of the fact? Why do you wish me to know that even queens can lie?"

"Indeed you mistake me——"

"Then never mind your explanation, listen to my statement. A squirrel peculiar to Bidi, as large as the largest full grown elephant! It has a scarlet stripe from nose to tail upon a brown grey body. Is its tail green, do you think?"

"I do not remember," said Sara evasively, now feeling unwilling to make any statement in jest that might so soon be repeated as true.

The conversation continued in much the same strain to the end of the dinner, and during this time Brenda Cheetham sat watching Sara Thorn

*See Note 2.

with eyes of uncontrolled malice. Her heart was sore within her, and she had great difficulty in sustaining the trifling conversation that from time to time was addressed to her by her neighbours on either side.

When she saw Lord Danby devote himself so willingly and so entirely to Sara Thorn, as he had done on this occasion, a doubt of his truthfulness to herself, mingled with her want of faith in his promises and destroyed her peace. Jealousy cannot argue from any premises but those before its very eyes.

Brenda was angrily jealous of all to whom Lord Danby paid any attention; but she never succeeded in making him jealous by apparently sunning herself in the eyes of other gentlemen. When she was alone with him she was certain of his good faith. He would have thought very ill of himself if he had not been able to convince her of it. When she was with him in society she was certain of his deceit! Brenda Cheetham paid the full penalty of her engagement with Lord Danby unknown to her parents. Independant of the unhappiness consequent on her constant anxiety, she never now appeared to advantage. Her thoughts were occupied with him, and Brenda herself became silent and dull.

Lady Grel, at a distance from her cousin, Lord Danby, was in a happy frame of mind. She was one of the few who enjoyed that "very stupid dinner." She was unconscious of Irene's jealousy

and watchful observance of her, and heartily glad and thankful to see Lord Danby's attention so entirely absorbed in Sara Thorn. She was quite unaware that Brenda Cheetham had any cause for unhappiness, and that she herself looked more lovely on this occasion than on any former one; in the eyes of the gentlemen lookers on. Grel was daily growing into more beauty of form, and more loveliness of feature; her character was strengthening, and her soul speaking in soft whispers through her eyes.

She had lost her dread of Mr. Maynooth—though he was no favourite with her. From the mere wish to let him see she had quite buried in oblivion their former misunderstanding, Grel's smiles were ever ready, and her manner always gracious. He—thorough man of the world, as he was—was misled by her girlish simplicity. He thought he was making an impression favourable to himself. He fancied Grel's smiles meant "that she had pleasure in his courtesies and attentions." They did not. Grel meant him to see she had forgotten the past, but she did not mean to give him hope or encouragement to build suitable castles for himself in the future. Not that Grel had the vanity to think Mr. Maynooth admired her! She had really no consciousness that her personal beauty was of so attractive a nature to gentlemen. She felt herself very much the same "girl" she had been on her sixteenth birthday. She felt herself ignorant of society, and in some

cases annoyed by its trammels, and she did not know that each day brought an added charm to her person, and that her intelligence of mind was shown in her expressive features.

CHAPTER XIII.

“THERE IS A FAULT IN THE HOUSE, BUT WOULD YOU HAVE IT BUILT WITHOUT ANY?”

MISTRESS NUALA MAYNOOTH had invited the Lady Grel to spend some time with her at Wolfscrag, and Grel was delighted to leave Prellsthorpe Rectory for a time, and enjoy a change both of scene and society.

She had on a former visit greatly admired Wolfscrag, and had longed to explore its woods and dells and summer day haunts. Then too, she had early attached herself to Mistress Nuala, and now, if she did not wish to meet Mr. Maynooth, she did not actually dread to see him.

She had been a day or two at Wolfscrag before Mr. and Miss Maynooth called. After this she honestly confessed to herself few gentlemen had a more deferential manner towards ladies, few had greater conversational powers, and still fewer more learning. It was true, she also admitted to herself, “he was not Mr. Hamilton,” and yet, with a odd sort of inconsistency, Grel acknowledged she

thought Mr. Maynooth the handsomer of the two. Much handsomer, if good looks had anything to do with preference, than that cynosure to every eye, the master of Prellsthorpe Abbey.

Grel felt herself attracted by those large and gentle-looking "forget-me-not" eyes, and she admired that long silken beard of fair hair. She remembered the expression of Mr. Hamilton's "dark, determined orbs" when she walked by his side in Prellsthorpe Park, and half shuddered as she recalled his look of scorn. And yet, with somewhat almost of infatuation, Grel preferred Mr. Hamilton! She knew she never had had a chance of looking well in his eyes. Everything had been against her, and much as she had always felt inclined to worship Mr. Hamilton for his supposed manliness, and talents, and goodness, she knew she had always been seen by him in a disadvantageous light. All these things were very provoking, thought Grel. And perhaps, as Mr. Hamilton was wholly unattainable to her, for she recalled his engagement with Irene, perhaps because he was so very far from looking upon her with a favourable eye, she worshipped him the more! We always gild the absent and the unattainable with the brightest hues, and Grel was no exception to the rule. It was unfortunate that her fancy was so pre-occupied, for she seemed blind and deaf to the perfections of any other gentleman.

She had now been about a week at Wolfscrag

and no event of importance had occurred. She enjoyed her visit, and began to count the days that she might still hope to remain there before it would be necessary to return to Prellsthorpe Rectory and its customary dullness; and on retiring for the night went up stairs with Mistress Nuala, and entering her dressing room, sat some little time longer in quiet chat until the chimes from the chapel clock warned her of the lateness of the hour.

She arose, and saying "good night," would have returned by the way she entered, and so have followed the long corridor to her own apartment; but the old lady directed her maid to open an opposite door, and told Grel that would be the nearest way. The maid stood holding open the door, which led into a passage, unlighted except by the light from the bedroom.

"This passage leads into the octagon," said Mistress Nuala, "and your door is the second on the right."

"Good nights" were once more exchanged, and the Lady Grel took up her taper and retired. She closed the door and walked on a few paces before she observed she had entered an octagonal apartment, lighted by a glass dome. The moon gleamed brightly and the stars twinkled through the many hues of the coloured glass. A pleasurable awe stole over her as she found herself in a new and unexpected locality, for though Mistress Nuala had said "the passage led into the octagon," the

last word had failed, in the hurry of the moment, to convey any distinct meaning to Grel, and the scene so little accorded with her expectations that she placed her taper on the table and for some time walked round and round the room, half wondering at the marvellous beauty of the dome, the heraldic insignia and gold tracery of which thus displayed by the moon were extraordinarily grand. A telescope stood in the centre of the room; she longed to "take her fill of gazing." She saw the pulleys that opened the different compartments of glass, but she knew it would not do to attempt to move the machinery unassisted. She took up her taper and turned to retire to her own apartment—but through which door? There were eight doors opening on the circle, all exactly alike. She did not know by which she had entered the octagon. She again walked round and round, trying to recall which star she had first seen. But all she could recollect was that she had done at first as she was then doing—walked round the room and admired the stained glass, and the moon and the stars. The large clock in the chapel struck one. The Maynooths had a private chapel attached to each residence, with apartments for the use of their clergy contiguous thereto.

"One o'clock," said she, with a start, and a little feeling of awe. "I really must make some effort, and enter some room—perhaps even return to Mistress Nuala, for I do not know one door

from another. It is well there are no other visitors, or I might disturb some one; it is bad enough, or it will be bad enough, to disturb dear Mistress Nuala, if by evil fortune I cannot hit upon the door that leads to my room. How foolishly I have acted, allowing myself to become enchanted with the beauty of the scene, and then——”

But she opened one of the doors as she spoke, and found herself in a passage of some eight or ten feet in length, with a door at the other end. She remembered this had been the case when she left Mistress Nuala, and concluded that she had by chance opened the same door.

“Ah! my room was the second to the right,” said she, as she carefully closed the door, and joyfully followed out these directions.

What, then, was her astonishment as she opened “the second door to the right” to find that it also opened into a passage in all things similar to the last—surprised, she certainly was, but not dismayed.

“I think this must be my room,” said she, as she softly and gently opened the door at the far end of the passage.

She stood for a second or two calmly contemplating the interior of the room thus disclosed to her. Then she turned, and very hastily retraced her steps. Trembling now, and terrified, she sank upon a chair, and gasping for breath, she sat awaiting the results of her temerity, if temerity it

could be called. We have said Grel stood for a second or two trying to make out the interior of the room, for she could not at first understand what she saw. But gradually she became conscious of a strong odour of tobacco, which almost stifled her, and apparently there was a dense smoke in the room, for though it was well lighted, objects looked dim and indistinct. She saw a lady entering the room by an opposite door at a great distance, as it seemed, and looking inquiringly round, and then she saw a gentleman seated in an easy-chair smoking a cigar. She saw him sit gazing at her, but he did not move—she saw, also, he was Mr. Maynooth.

This was a great trial to her already overwrought sensibility. After she had been seated under the dome for some little time, she blamed herself for a want of forethought in not having locked the door through which she had returned, and thus have prevented Mr. Maynooth from intruding upon her. She arose to do so. Alas! she could not again tell one door from another. She fancied she heard footsteps approaching; instinctively, her taper in her hand, she rushed across the circle to an opposite door, and opening it, a second time entered a dark passage, exactly similar to the first. With a trembling hand, she attempted to open the further door; very gently and timidly she did so, and succeeding at last, found a second room well lighted, and with a pervading odour of tobacco. She saw again the

same lady at the opposite door, and felt rather than saw that Mr. Maynooth was still seated in his easy-chair, and still with his cigar in his mouth. She gasped for breath, as she let the door fall to, and turning, fled to the octagon. She seated herself despondingly, and at first was not sufficiently mistress of herself to know what to do next, or even how to account for so provoking a *contretemps* as the having intruded into the same room twice. But now, as she sat thinking, and trying to unravel the mystery, she discovered that she was exactly in the same strait as at first, for she did not know through which door she had last returned. She could only recollect rushing heedlessly back, and trying to save herself from falling by clinging to the first chair.

“And yet, in spite of these vexations, I must still seek for my own room ; I cannot stay here all night, or, at least, I would rather not,” said she to herself, and after a little more reflection, she took more note of this now almost charmed circle. “I cannot see anything that can guide me to know the difference between the doors.”

The pillar of the telescope stand came up through the centre of what served for a table ; the telescope itself, had the field turned up to the zenith. Though the Lady Grel was timid by nature, and had been made nervous by the persecutions of her cousin, Lord Danby, in a difficulty like the present she courageously rose to meet the occasion. Happily she had no need to

trouble herself on the subject of ghosts and goblins, as Almerie Barrymore had, though the chapel clock gave the quarters with exact precision.

“It is now more than a quarter past one—what shall I do? What will Fanchon think of my long delay? Perhaps she may suppose I am still with the good old lady. However, I will not remain here all night if I can help it, and so I will lay a trap for myself.”

She opened a door; she could not tell if it were the same she had before tried, or another, and placed her glove to prop it back. Then she crossed the circle, and did the same by an opposite door. She took up her taper, and stood musing for a second or two.

“No,” said she, replacing it on the table—“I will leave the taper here. It lights up both passages now that the doors are propped open, and if I find myself intruding into an unlighted room, I can fetch it.”

Although she had, as the phrase goes, “screwed up her courage” to attempt once more to find her own apartment, it must be admitted she walked up the passage with a beating heart. She returned without having opened the door to commune with herself.

“If I find, upon entering, that this room is not my own I must remember to go straight across to the door that I have propped open opposite, and if neither should be mine——”

She heaved a deep sigh, and once more went on what had now assumed the dignity of a perilous mission. She placed her hand on the handle of the door and turned it without noise. She only partially opened the door; the room was well-lighted; a lady in the distant part of the room was, like herself, just peeping in through an opposite door; a gentleman, Mr. Maynooth, seated in an easy chair, still smoking a cigar; still unchanged in position, still smiling the same happy and contented smile.

With a very trembling hand she contrived to close the door, and with faltering steps once more reached the table in the centre of the circle. For the first time tears rose to her eyes. The clock chimed the half hour, and Grel had scarcely courage to attempt another door. But still mindful that it would be wise to attempt to find her own room, she crossed the charmed circle to the opposite door, still leaving her glove propping open that from which she had just returned.

Again, with an unsteady hand, and while the tears were still wet upon her cheeks, she slowly turned the handle, and by small degrees opened the door just sufficiently wide to peep in and reconnoitre for herself without disturbing the occupier, should it unfortunately be occupied. A streak of light was visible with the first opening of the door, and a delicious scent of perfumes, to which she was accustomed, now gratified her sensitiveness to sweet essences, in the place of the tobacco that had

on three several occasions almost stifled her. Yet again, to her utter dismay and perplexity, she saw the same lady peeping in through an opposite door, whom she had beforetime so distinctly seen; the same easy chair tenanted by some figure, not yet clearly visible, but of course eventually to be recognised as that now much dreaded Mr. Maynooth. Anxious, breathless with apprehension, and bewildered, she called up her courage and stood her ground, and in the course of a few more seconds distinctly comprehended she had found her own apartment. Her maid Fanchon was sitting asleep in an easy chair, and the lady peeping in from an opposite door only a reflection of herself in a large mirror.

Joyfully now she let the door fall to and returned to the table for her taper. In her hurry the train of her robe dragged away the glove that had hitherto propped open the door into the octagon, and it closed after her. Fortunately for her still bewildered senses she had not removed the glove from the opposite door, and the mystification ceased. She seized her taper, picked up her glove, and re-entered the passage that led to her own room, but she acknowledged to herself she could not for the wealth of the Indies cross that charmed circle to recover the fellow glove.

Arrived at last safe in her own room, she was surprised to find it empty. No Fanchon in attendance, whom she had so lately seen asleep in the easy chair. She observed that the door by which

she ordinarily entered her apartment stood open, and conjecturing that from some cause or other perhaps Fanchon had been alarmed, with a presence of mind her late difficulties had called into action, she immediately called "Fanchon, Fanchon," and the startled maid returned.

"Oh! dear my lady—oh! dear me, my lady, I have never been so terrified in all my life! It was a ghost, my lady, all in white a-staring at me; and then, when I stirred and gave a loud scream, it vanished, my lady, with a noise that was awful."

"I am later than usual, and you have been dreaming, Fanchon."

"Dreaming, my lady! I never was more wide awake in all my whole life, my lady, than I was this blessed night, and counted the chapel clock, my lady, striking twelve. It sounds so awful, my lady, in the dead of the night, and I quite wondered, my lady, if you would come soon, that is, my lady, before one o'clock, for this place is not one bit like Prellsthorpe, my lady, it's so full of ghosts, and——"

"Thanks, Fanchon, I shall manage very well now," for the maid had been attending to her mistress while she chattered thus volubly, and in spite of her name "Fanchon,"—which Brenda Cheetham said was one of Grel's affectations—she was a girl from the village of Prellsthorpe with as much ignorance, and as little common sense as might be found in most village girls. "You may retire

now," said Grel, "and no doubt after a good sleep your nerves will recover their tone."

"Thank you, my lady, but I am quite *sure* I saw a ghost."

"Nonsense, Fanchon, you will be wiser to-morrow. You have been dreaming."

When the Lady Grel was left alone she allowed to herself that the girl's terror was natural, but her own adventures had made her more than usually cautious and she did not let Fanchon see the extent of her sympathy for her. Fanchon said she had just heard the clock strike twelve. Grel was aware it was nearer two than twelve, but she did not wish to have to admit the fact of her return to her room at so late an hour, if she could help it. She, now that she was alone, gazed round the room, not with the superstitious awe of the girl, but with her faculties all alive to the fact that she had entered by some door that was not visible now. She re-lighted her taper to examine the wall closely. It was panelled; the mouldings of each panel were gilt scrolls. Large groups of flowers and fruit in alto-relievo of the same dark wood as the panel, surrounded by gilt scrolls of arabesque patterns, adorned the centre of each. The skirting board was ornamented with scrolls and medallions to match, but nowhere could she find any appearance of a door. She knew exactly where the opening in the panelling must be because she had seen herself in the glass opposite, but she could find no mark to betray the fact of a door in that part of

the room. If she wished to retrace her steps to the octagon room, she could not.

"The panel is the door, it must be so. But I certainly do not like to sleep in a room that can be entered at any minute in this disagreeable manner," said she, and then she seated herself and reflected that she never fastened the door of her room, and that if anyone were inclined to enter, they would enter as readily by the ordinary as by the extraordinary door.

"Yes," said she in reply to her thoughts; but only ordinary people will enter by the ordinary door, and I may expect extraordinary people through that strange entrance. However, I must undress; I must not let Fanchon think, when she comes in the morning, that I too have been sitting watching for ghosts;" and while she disrobed she went on with her reverie. "I am sure I saw Mr. Maynooth—three times I entered his room. I wonder if he, like Fanchon, was asleep, or—or if he saw me?" The blush of "Maidenhood" dyed her cheeks as she asked herself this terrible question. "One thing comforts me even amid all these worries—the Maynooths are very excellent people, at least Yolande and Mistress Nuala are, and perhaps—why, I remember Mr. Maynooth never betrayed to any one my inadvertence in the Park, and——" but the tears pattered down in an unchecked stream, and for a few minutes Grel abandoned herself to her vexation. "Of course I shall have to meet him at breakfast—I cannot

think what I shall do. If I affect illness, and so remain in bed for breakfast, I shall only make Mistress Nuala uncomfortable, and after all have to meet him at luncheon, unless I become really ill," and Grel felt all her former dread of Mr. Maynooth return; but the chimes of the chapel clock again caught her attention and turned the current of her thoughts. "Half-past two," said she. "I will sit in this easy-chair till the sun is up—till it is broad day, and then I will get into bed and lie there awake and watching until Fanchon comes."

If other thoughts troubled Grel on this momentous occasion, it is not necessary to record them. Suffice it that her powers of resistance against the attacks of slumber were less potent than she gave herself credit for. She heard the clock strike three—she heard no more—she slept.

At six she awoke, and at first wondered to find herself in her wrapper and slippers at that hour. Then by degrees the adventures of the night were recalled, and she saw the propriety of getting into bed at once, that she might not give cause for questioning. As she lay there pondering over the past, she marvelled if other ladies of her age and want of experience committed the same errors! All the trouble of the night and all the anxiety of the morning would have been spared her if she had simply obeyed Mistress Nuala's directions, and gone at once on entering the octagon to the second door on the right.

“But then the exquisite beauty of the stained glass, with the moon shining brightly, so charmed me. I forgot everything but the present moment, and enjoyed it. Alas! I must add I pay dearly for that enjoyment.”

Nevertheless, she determined to arise at her usual hour, and courageously meet Mr. Maynooth at breakfast. On entering the breakfast-room rather later than usual, she was for the moment thankful to find Mistress Nuala alone. The good old lady made no allusion to their parting over night, or to the having sent Grel to her own room through the octagon, and Grel herself carefully avoided the subject. At present she had not courage to ask to see the octagon at mid-day instead of in the dead of night; and besides, Grel's nerves were sadly disturbed—every time the door opened she feared that Mr. Maynooth would enter.

CHAPTER XIV.

“NO SMOKE WITHOUT SOME FIRE.”

ON the morning that Grel was so full of nervous dread at Wolfscrag, the breakfast-table at Mitreberris was enlivened by a few remarks of an unusual nature, which we will now record.

“It was half-past eleven when I rode into the courtyard, Yolande. I never saw Wolfscrag look

more lovely than it did in the moonlight last night. However, I did not walk about and take poetical note of everything as Almeric Barrymore would have done, but entered the house at once. I knew dear old aunty would be gone to bed, so I told Riddle to put me some refreshment in the dining-room and not let his mistress be disturbed. I was just cutting into a delicious cold saddle when Aunt Nuala herself walked in for a bottle of some kind of essence she had left on the mantelshelf. She is always glad to see me, dear old soul! but on this occasion she advised me to keep as quiet as I could, since I meant to ride off again ‘on the top of the morning.’ She did not see the necessity for proclaiming to her visitor—Grel Stuart, the darling!—that her residence had been thus summarily invaded by so rough and hirsute a male as myself—the rougher for my ride of thirty miles. You remember, Yolande, we go to Wolfscrag to-morrow. Aunt says we had better come prepared to stay a day or two. Grel has been told we are invited, and so, I suppose, her ‘violets’ will be tutored to meet my ‘forget-me-nots.’”

“Nay, Raymond, I cannot unravel that; you grow daily more difficult to comprehend. What do you mean by ‘violets and forget-me-nots?’”

“Do you not know one of Conraddin Barrymore’s romances, each verse of which ends with,

“The lady’s eyes were violets,
But Conrad’s were forget-me-nots.”

“There is no rhyme, Raymond, nor can I see

what the couplet can have to do with you and the Lady Grel Stuart."

"I did not say there was rhyme; but there is rhythm, and an aptness of expression as applied to Grel and myself."

"I am too dull to apply such lines to you and the Lady Grel."

"Grel's lovely eyes are violets,
And Raymond's are forget-me-nots,"

sang Mr. Maynooth.

"You vain sinner!" said Yolande.

And then Mr. Maynooth started up, and hummed as he walked up and down the room,

"Oh! there's nothing half so sweet in life as love's young dream."

Miss Maynooth laughed.

"The dear, darling female creature," resumed Mr. Maynooth, "with her dark blue dove-like violets trembling in dew."

"Oh! most romantic huge man, stop this nonsense."

"She has thrown down the gauntlet, Yolande!"

"Has she, indeed!"

"Here it is."

And he drew forth a tiny kid glove and kissed it rapturously.

"Is that the Lady Grel Stuart's glove?" said Yolande, in a tone of extreme surprise.

"No, it is mine. You may stare, Yolande, but she threw it down to me last night."

"Down where, Raymond?"

"Down at the door."

And Mr. Maynooth reseated himself.

"Tell me, Raymond, are you really engaged to Lady Grel?"

"Of course I am; why do you ask so foolish a question?"

"Raymond, Raymond, how delighted I am!" said she enthusiastically. "And when did this happen?"

"What happen?"

"Why this engagement with Grel?"

"Ever since I buttoned up my coat at Landeswold to prevent people from seeing my heart in a flutter."

"I do not understand you."

"Then give me some more coffee."

"But you said you were engaged; Raymond, I cannot make out your meaning."

"You must be an intensely blind female if you think I am not engaged. Of course I am, and have been ever since the poultry show at Landeswold. Soon, very soon, I will marry and comfort her for all the sufferings her tender and sensitive "Maidenhood" brings upon her. She is a jewel of a woman, and came to me last night, Yolande, when the old lady was in bed."

"Raymond! If you persist in talking such nonsense I will not listen."

"Then shut your ears, for I shall talk; not that because I choose to talk it must of necessity be

nonsense; indeed it is not, I would not so waste my words. She came to see me, and——”

“But, Raymond dear, I am very sure, that the very sensitive and very modest Lady Grel would do no such thing.”

“So like a woman, always sure “on the wrong side of the hedge.” I say she *did* come to me, three several times, each time more shy and timid than the preceding. But, oh! Yolande, I was as wary as the oldest fox in the kingdom. I cannot tell by what strange chance she had entered the octagon room.”

“Raymond! You do not mean you met her there?”

“No. I never left my cosy chair.”

“If you would but tell me the real circumstances quickly, Raymond! I declare I feel quite uncomfortable.”

“I was seated with my cigar in my mouth, thinking of her, and telling her she must expect my proposals very shortly, when I heard the door open from the octagon. ‘You may come in, my darling,’ said I, for I positively felt the pleasurable sensation of her approach. She came on through the passage, her tiny feet pit-a-patting along, and opened the door into my room——”

“Oh! heavens, Raymond!—can this be true?”

“As that God is in heaven! It was heavenly, Yolande, to me. There she stood for a second or two looking at her lovely self in the glass, and at me in my easy-chair. Then she shut the door and

fled—her little feet as terrified as her fluttering heart.”

“Is it really, undeniably true, Raymond?”

“Have I not said, as that God is in heaven! If you are so sceptical I shall tell you no more.”

“Oh! yes, pray do? What next, Raymond? What came next; did you rise and follow her?”

“Yolande! Yolande!” said Mr. Maynooth, shaking his head slowly, “have I not told you I am a fox, a mighty fox? There I sat in my chair smoking my cigar so quietly, that if I were mistaken for a lamb instead of a fox, was it my fault? I sat as still and silent as if I had been one of my own marble statues! And—just as I had foreseen—she came again!”

“Poor thing!—she could not find her own room.”

“Just so. Of course I knew that. Nevertheless, if I had started up and said, ‘My darling, let me show you the way,’ she would have broken her neck in some futile attempt to escape from my touch.”

“Poor thing!—that is just one of the things I do think so wrong in Aunt Nuala.”

“To break her neck in some futile attempt to escape?”

“Nonsense, Raymond; it is wrong in aunt to possess such a room, and not——”

“How is Aunt Nuala to blame? She found the octagon at Wolfscrag when she came into possession, and she is forbidden, by the restrictions

in holding the property, 'to alter, destroy, cut, main, or otherwise disfigure, or transform the room called "octagon" '—it is so unique a relic of past ages. How, then, is Aunt Nuala wrong?"

"She is wrong in not pointing out to her visitors that each door is known by the initial letters in the gold tracery in the dome."

"Ah! that is a different thing. However, Yolande, it is clear she had omitted to tell Grel, and Grel, the darling, was lost in the octagon."

"Poor, dear Grel!—I love her all the more, Raymond. What became of her eventually?"

"She came to me for counsel."

"To you?—impossible! Raymond, tell me the truth."

"She found all things on her second visit as on the first, but she was more timid in peering about the room. I did not stir a muscle; I was almost afraid to blink my eyes, for fear I should lose sight of her when she appeared a third time, for I heard her make preparations. I suppose, by my extreme quietness, she had learned to take me for a man asleep; and when she came a third time, she put some mark to distinguish that particular door from the others, if again unsuccessful. I knew, when she peeped in on this occasion, that she would not come again, but I still kept my fox's position. At length I heard a door bang, and I concluded the darling had at length found her own room; but to make sure, I did not alter my position till the clock struck two."

“Two o’clock, Raymond?”

“Then I arose; ‘and,’ said I to myself, ‘she may still be in the octagon, and I do not wish to alarm her in any way.’ So I opened my door gently, and saw——”

“Poor thing!—Raymond, I could weep for her. How dreadfully terrified she would be!—did she scream?”

“No; she was perfectly still.”

“What was she doing?—you saw her in the octagon.”

“No. I saw the door leading into the octagon propped open, and I went down on my hands and knees, and creeping thus through the passage, I carefully peeped all round the room before I made my presence known. She was not there. The door had been kept open by her tiny glove, and here it is,” continued he, as he drew it forth and kissed it.

“Raymond! Raymond!—what will she do, poor thing?”

“Without her glove?—I will send her a dozen boxes of all kinds and colours. On thinking over the adventures of that night as I rode home this morning, I came to the conclusion, Yolande, that Grel did not take me for a real man.”

“What else could she take you for?—the idea is absurd.”

“Nothing is absurd that makes a woman’s mind easy—and such a woman!”

And again he kissed the glove, replaced it in

the breast-pocket of his coat, leaned back in his chair, and stroked his beard with much complacency.

“Then you had not many hours sleep?”

“None at all. If Aunt Nuala had not accidentally entered the dining-room while I was at supper, only Riddle and the groom Joe would have known of my intrusion. I rode away from Wolfscrag about six.”

“And we dine there to-morrow?”

“Ay, Yolande; we dine, and sleep, and——”

“Shall I give you more coffee?”

“No—I have done.”

CHAPTER XV.

“SPEEDY EXECUTION IS THE MOTHER OF GOOD-FORTUNE.”

THE Lady Grel did not leave Wolfscrag until after she had fathomed the mystery of the octagon. On Miss Maynooth's arrival she replied to Grel's queries, and explained that each room was distinguished by a letter over the door. When the two ladies were there in broad daylight, Grel was more gratified than she had been even on her entrance in the night. The sun shone now in place of the moon, and the scene was light and brilliant. The upper compartments of the dome contained the arms of the Maynooths, with

their many quarterings, in all the brilliancy that heralds so well understand. The lower divisions were filled with different devices in many colours, blues, greens, golds, scarlets, purples, reds, and violets, mingled together in mazy and intricate-looking patterns. Miss Maynooth pointed out to the notice of her friend the name "Maynooth" in letters of gold, meandering through the different colours in the lower part of the dome, a single letter over each door.

"Look, Grel, the 'N' over this door points out Aunt Nuala's room, and when I live here with her, as I do when Raymond is away, I have this room," and she opened a door as she spoke. "Do you see the 'Y' over the door?"

"That is charming," said Grel, enthusiastically, "the initial letter of your name. But there is no 'R' in the dome, so I suppose Mr. Maynooth has no apartment here?"

Grel was trying to find out facts without committing herself by any confession, a pardonable act in the career of "Maidenhood."

"Yes he has. The two 'O's' are always Raymond's; the rooms open one into the other, and are intended for the master of the house. This house is Raymond's, and it is a much larger and better house than Mitreberis, but he did not wish to disturb Aunt Nuala, who has lived here all her life and brought us both up. Raymond has always said he should not marry, and that therefore Mitreberis would be sufficiently large for him.

But you observe there is not an 'R' among the letters of the dome. All the Maynooths are christened 'Otho.' My brother is 'Otho Raymond;' our eldest brother 'Otho' died, and my brother Raymond would not use the name 'Otho' for his sake, the remembrance of our loss was so painful to us. He always signs 'Otho Raymond.' But now you shall see the rooms that have entrances into the octagon."

Grel saw that the apartments had each a large mirror opposite to the door. This peculiarity had added much to her mystification on the previous night. As they were hastily entering one of the rooms Miss Maynooth started, and for a moment or two hesitated to enter. Grel, nervously afraid of encountering Mr. Maynooth, turned away, but she was recalled by her friend, who laughingly told her she had mistaken Raymond's "large wrapper" for himself.

"You see, Grel, just as I was about to enter, I saw an enormous mass of something in the large chair, and really that smoking cap at the top of the mass quite helped to deceive me; but come, come in," said she as she took Grel's hand, "you need not look so awe-struck. Raymond is not here; and if he were you need not be so terribly alarmed."

"Let us go away, Yolande; I would rather not see this room if it be Mr. Maynooth's."

And Grel tried to disengage her hand, and make her escape.

“Pooh, pooh, Grel; Raymond is at Heraldstowe by this time in grand consultation with Sir Hildebrand for the fête of the 25th. And you can do no harm by simply peeping at his rooms with me by your side.”

But Grel's equanimity was not restored. She saw this was the very room into which she had so frequently intruded on that memorable night. Her steadily fixed gaze on the chair she thought she had seen on the previous night occupied by Mr. Maynooth himself, amused Miss Maynooth, who said,

“Grel, Grel, do you think my large brother is hidden under the folds of his own wrap? Look, dear, and send away your terror with a glance. The cushions from the sofa have been accidentally piled up in the chair, and the large robe thrown over them, with the dainty cap just at the top; these things might have deceived a wiser person than I.”

Grel was quickly making up her mind to the fact that perhaps she had deceived herself, that perhaps the very peculiar position in which she was placed on that wonderful night had assisted in creating objects that did not actually exist. She recalled now, with a sensation of pleasure, that the figure she had mistaken for Mr. Maynooth had never once altered in position, and so perhaps after all she had allowed her imagination to be imposed upon by a heap of pillows and a little Turkish-looking drapery. This was no ruse on the part of

Miss Maynooth; she had not intended to lead Grel's thoughts into this channel, and yet she, too, saw with a secret sort of satisfaction that Grel had quietly accepted this mute evidence as a proof that she had misled herself.

"Come into the next room," and she opened a connecting door. "This, you will see, is a jewel of a room, and I know I am transgressing when I bring you here. Raymond will not, if he knows it, allow any lady to set foot in this room."

"Then I will not enter," said Grel, stepping back.

"Nonsense, Grel, why do you retire? You are just the very person whom Raymond would wish should see the room. It is a lovely room; oh! the most lovely in the world, that is the English world. It commands the river and the distant hills, and has a charming home view, and though it is not fitted up as—as—why, as it will be if ever Raymond should marry, still it is sufficiently beautiful in its present state to——"

"Hush! Yolande, all you can say would not tempt me to enter when I know Mr. Maynooth does not wish me."

"He would, Grel, he would wish you to enter."

"Why do you say this, Yolande? You make me comprehend that Mr. Maynooth will scarcely forgive, if I may use so strong a term, forgive *you* if you were to allow the room to be entered by a stranger, and——"

"You are no stranger, dear Grel; and I am sure

Raymond would forgive you if he caught you on the spot."

"And would you really ask me to place myself in such a position as to require—forgiveness—from Mr. Maynooth."

Yolande was silent. She could not for the moment distinguish between two things. Was it startled and timid "Maidenhood," trembling in the fear of finding anything incongruous to its own education, or preconceived ideas; or was it "the Lady Grel Stuart," daughter of the late and niece of the present Earl of Prellsthorpe, whose dignity could not be allowed to come in contact with plain "Otho Raymond Maynooth."

But the Lady Grel had retreated from the dangerously tempting entrance to the forbidden chamber, and Yolande silently followed.

"I hope we have not done any harm," said Grel simply, and with a wish to break through the painful silence.

"Harm, indeed! What harm could we have done if we had entered? Nevertheless, through your extreme tenderness of conscience, we have not intruded our gracious selves into Raymond's sanctum."

Meanwhile, when Grel turned to leave the apartment she found herself in the same difficulty she had before experienced in her own room—there was no appearance of a door; and without noticing the tone of pique in which Miss Maynooth spoke, or without replying to her statement, she said,

"How do we manage to return to the octagon, there is no door to be seen? True, I know exactly where it is placed, but I am a perfect prisoner—I cannot find means of egress!"

"The doors are opened by the pressure of springs. If you look at the patterns of the arabesque scrolls you will see here and there many lines meet together under a slightly raised gold knob. If you have observed these knobs, you will know they are placed irregularly all over the room; sometimes two or three are near together, sometimes the scroll runs a long distance without this termination."

"I see; it is so."

"The panelling of each room is different in colour and design, the scrolls also vary very much." She opened the door as she spoke. "In this room, if you press a particular gold knob the door will open, but there are no knobs in the room you occupy, and in their stead you have clusters of golden tendrils meeting together every now and then, and the spring is under one of the clusters."

"How very strange! Why, it is like—like——"

"Like a house for state prisoners, is it not? But, Grel, dear, this is the old part of Wolfscrag; and in the old, old times my excellent and truly Catholic ancestors worshipped in secret. Come once more to the octagon; this was the chapel, or used as a chapel in those times. The altar rails were standing when Aunt Nuala was a child—she remembers them."

Grel raised her eyebrows in mute surprise.

"The entrance to this holy place was only known to the master of the house and the Father Ambrose of the day—that is in 'the olden time' I mean. But I must not get on that subject, or I shall tell you some strange weird stories."

"And they will lose half their power in the light of this brilliant sunshine. But sometime or other, Yolande, when the storm is howling outside, and the lights burn blue and dim within, then you shall tell me, because then I could shiver and shake, and stare and creep closer to you, and believe all you tell me!"

"You naughty Grel! Then you would not credit me in the broad light of day?" And she led Grel into another room through a passage from the octagon.

"Weird stories require weird lights and rumbling, unexpected noises to support the wonderful relation."

"This is my room, Grel."

"There are no gold knobs, no clusters of tendrils here," said Grel, looking around.

"The rosebuds cover the springs."

"Do show me, Yolande."

"The third rosebud from the top on the left-hand of the door conceals the spring in this room."

"Is it always the third?"

"Oh! no. My room has 'Y' over the door in the octagon; that is the *third* letter in the name Maynooth, therefore the number 'three' is the key to this room."

"To Mistress Nuala's will the number 'four' be the key?—and to my room 'A' is 'two' the key?"

"Yes, that is the entire mystery," said Yolande.

"But, Yolande, I hope I have not been transgressing any—any wish or law by asking these questions?" said Grel a little awe-stricken; "Mr. Maynooth perhaps does not——"

She was interrupted by a laugh from her companion, who said,

"Oh! my dear Grel, there are no mysteries in these days. All the domestics know all the secret springs—or, rather, I should say hidden springs, for they are no longer secret. Perhaps I misled you when I said 'the manner of opening the doors was a secret;' but you take me too literally."

"I declare, then, I am quite enchanted with this dear old house. Come to my room, Yolande, and let me try the spring in your presence; for, to tell you the truth, the octagon has a great charm for me, and in the night, or rather evening, I may even venture to take another peep if I can only come and go to my own room without trouble."

"The ancestors of the Hamiltons were once Catholic," said Yolande, as if in her own mind she connected the Abbey with Wolfscrag.

"Roman Catholic!" said the Lady Grel, with the nicety of distinction in which she had been brought up.

"There must be many more marvels, if you call these marvels, at the Abbey than here.

There are passages underground leading to the river and—but do you like the Abbey and the Hamiltons?”

“I do not know much of the Abbey,” said Grel, gaining a little time to make up her mind as to “her opinion of the Hamiltons.” The secret worship she gave to the lord of that house made her wishful to avoid any conversation on the subject. “I cannot say either, that I know much of the Hamiltons. I dined there once, when you and Mr. Maynooth were present; and when I called with Mrs. Cheetham afterwards we only left cards. The Abbey is certainly a magnificent pile of building, and placed evidently where the old monks loved to dwell; low, in a valley, close by running trout streams, and under the shelter of the rising hills and tall trees around. But then, I must tell you,” said Grel, screwing up her courage to speak of Mr. Hamilton without betraying her liking for him if possible, “living with the Cheethams as I have done from babyhood, I have been brought up to look with an eye of wonder and awe upon the Abbey; first, as a building unlike any other within hundreds of miles—some even say it is unique in the kingdom—and again upon the too constantly absent master of the Abbey, as of one who was somewhat superior to the rest of the world!”

“What that disagreeable Mr. Hamilton?”

“I have been educated in the faith I have propounded to you,” said Grel with a smile, inwardly congratulating herself that she could state this

much with truth ; “and I am still too entirely inexperienced to be able to prove the truth or fallacy of this faith. But you, then, do not like Mr. Hamilton ? neither does Brenda Cheetham, though both Mr. and Mrs. Cheetham like him so much. Now my cousin Irene thinks him the most learned, and handsome, and——”

“Then does she like him ? And call him handsome ?”

“Indeed, he *is* handsome, and the Cheethams say he is so good. Now good, clever, handsome, rich, and the master of that charming Abbey, even Irene, who is so very particular, could not desire more.”

“More what ?” said Yolande, as she watched Grel with a scrutinising eye.

“Perfections in an admirer,” said Grel, somewhat enthusiastically.

“Ay, ay—Mr. Hamilton, I am told, does admire your cousin. I wish her joy of her conquest.”

When Grel was left alone she could not help letting her thoughts dwell on the mysterious room that Yolande had said was “a jewel of a room.”

“I could not form any opinion as to its beauties, whether of interior arrangement or of views from its windows, for the moment she spoke of ‘transgressing Raymond’s orders,’ as a matter of course I stepped back. I do not actually want to see any of his hidden treasures, or to explore any of his sacred recesses. But it does seem odd to have a

room that ladies—and why ladies I wonder—are not permitted to enter. And yet again, perhaps it is not strange, for how should I know about such things! Yolande said ‘he would forgive me!’ Certainly he would, upon the principle that I had forgiven him—but then I would not lower myself by acting in such a manner as to require forgiveness!—and yet of all things—” and she began to pace the room backwards and forwards—“of all things in the world I do wonder what Mr. Maynooth keeps shut up in that room!”

She would not have been a daughter of Eve if she had been devoid of curiosity.

Before dinner on this same day Yolande knocked at Grel’s dressing-room door, and craved an audience of a few minutes.

“You are alone, Grel, I want to say a few words. How nice you look in your lovely white dress—and what a splendid bouquet! I shall be jealous, Harrison seldom sends me anything worth having——”

“Then change with me,” said Grel, offering her bouquet.

“Fie! Grel, would I do such a thing! But, love, I am come to thank you for your great goodness to-day.”

“Goodness! what have I done, Yolande?—indeed I do not understand you.”

“Then let me sit down by your side while I tell my tale.”

“A ‘weird’ one will not do; the sun is too bright, Yolande”

"Listen, Grel, Raymond is the best of brothers ; as he is mine I may fearlessly praise him, and you may, if you please, discredit my words. Still, however sceptical you may be—I aver he is the *best* of brothers. And his temper!—perfection. Nothing superior in the whole human world. The exception proves the rule, and on this day I have had the exception."

"Seen Mr. Maynooth out of temper?"

"For the very first time in my life!"

"And whatever has caused this?" said Grel.

"You shall hear. I was telling him I had taken you to his sanctum, and—and I never was so taken aback in all my life! He positively stormed!"

"Oh! Yolande, I will go home," said Grel impulsively.

"My dear Grel," said Yolande, pulling her back on to the sofa.

"The only thing that appeased him was your what he called most highly principled conduct. He said three fourths and more of the young ladies in the world would certainly have gratified their curiosity, and then deliberately chatted on the subject to their heart's content; but you had more sense than to do either, and he should thank you accordingly. There!—think of that, Grel."

"Oh! no, Yolande; I am sure I wish I could go home, or was not here, or had never seen the room, or—or——"

Grel was becoming desperate, and Yolande put

her arm round her, and prevented her leaving the sofa.

"Now, Grel, darling, why do you so fuss yourself?—I did the wrong, not you. You never set a foot into the room; you were accidentally standing on the large white mat at the entrance, and when I told you of Raymond's wish, you came no further. And now you blame yourself as if you had done wrong, whereas—but I wish I had not told you of his annoyance, and that he wished to thank you for your forbearance. I only meant to prepare you, Grel, that when Raymond entered on the subject you might know you need only listen, for you had nothing to fear. And now it seems to me that the remedy is worse than the disease."

"Thanks, Yolande; I feel you were kind in wishing to prepare me, because I know so little of Mr. Maynooth, and sometimes I make such mistakes."

All Grel's dread of Mr. Maynooth was fast returning upon her.

"But cannot you counsel him to let the subject alone—prevent him from speaking to me?"

"I fear not," said Yolande, shaking her head slowly.

"Then I will remain here until I hear the gong——"

"Oh! no, Grel; we must go down and help Aunt Nuala—the Barrymores dine with us to-day. Is not Zara a handsome creature? Ray-

mond says she is quite like a queen amongst a bevy of ladies."

"She is very handsome," said Grel, still thinking how she could manage to avoid a meeting with Mr. Maynooth.

"Come, my darling, we must go," said Yolande, rising; "and do not you mind Raymond; he will——"

"Yolande, dear, *do* let me remain here until the gong sounds——"

"Nonsense, Grel—you must not. And let me tell you, Grel, nothing except Raymond's anger, has more astonished me for a length of time than your want of courage—and then, dear, your want of foresight. Why, my darling, when a man means to do a thing, he does it, in spite of the whole world—that is, if he is a man of any spirit. You see, Grel, dear, as you have no brother, you cannot be expected to be so learned as I on the subject; but I assure you of my own positive knowledge, *if a man means to do a thing, he does it*, and so do not suppose, if you manage to escape my brother to-day, that you will therefore never meet. You only prolong your own misery."

"I never thought of that," said Grel, her courage rising to meet the present difficulty, and so have done with it. "How right you are, Yolande!—come, come."

And Grel hastily, and without ceremony, ran along the corridors, and down the stairs, through the large hall, and across the ante-room, ere she

reached the saloon, where she found Mr. Maynooth, standing at the further end, intent on a newspaper in his hand. At this sight Grel stopped her eager haste, and paused to recover in some degree her lost respiration; she leaned on the back of a chair for support, and then Yolande joined her, and laughingly said,

“And so you thought you would run into the very jaws of the lion?”

“I beg your pardon,” said Mr. Maynooth, putting down the paper, and coming hastily forward.

But now Grel had gathered up her courage, and with her head erect, her finely-cut nostrils distended, and her eye fixed upon Mr. Maynooth, she stepped forward to meet him, and to Yolande’s astonishment, took the initiative upon herself.

“I wish to tell you I did not set foot in your—your ‘sanctum,’ if that is the name of the room; I only stood upon the mat at the door for a second or two. I would not have done that if I had known of your wish. To this moment I do not know what the room is like.”

“I know—I know,” said Mr. Maynooth, in accents so low and gentle as to surprise Grel, who had never before heard any gentleman’s voice so tender and impressive. “But why do you trouble yourself to tell me this?”

He took her outstretched hand as he spoke. Grel had been up to this time earnestly intent on her own exculpation, and had not seen the expres-

sion of his countenance. But now, moved, or rather attracted by the extraordinary change in the tone of his voice, she raised her eyes to his, and saw, to her still further astonishment, Mr. Maynooth himself as much altered as his voice. A feeling of awe gradually crept over her as she stood listening to tones so soft and dulcet, and unlike any other sounds that had ever charmed her ear. Mr. Maynooth had taken her hand, as we have said, and Grel had not resisted ; he now drew her arm within his own, and they began to walk down the saloon towards the open window, and still Grel remained passive, as he said,

“I wished to thank you for your kind forbearance—Yolande has told you probably. I am very much like the rest of mankind, if I may be allowed to speak of myself, and I have a whim or two, such as you may have noticed in others occasionally.”

Grel listened, and, we must admit, with a charmed ear, *not* to the actual words, for she did not gather their meaning, but to the exquisitely-musical tones of Mr. Maynooth's voice.

“But you will not think me a Bluebeard, will you?” added he, after a little pause, and stooping to her with a smile so handsome, as involuntarily on her part again to attract her attention.

“I have not thought of Bluebeard,” said she, simply, as she mutely confessed to herself there was something extremely agreeable in Mr. Maynooth.

"But now that you know I have an apartment which I wish to keep sacred from intrusion, shall you not give me that terrible title?"

"No. Not unless I know more about the room than I do now. I should not myself suspect you of having any ill concealed there, like——" Grel had spoken hurriedly and scarcely knowing what she said; she stopped and cast down her eyes, as she suddenly found herself in a dilemma. Mr. Maynooth came to the rescue.

"Like Bluebeard? No, no," said he, now laughing good-naturedly; "I can assure you with much truth I have *not* the remains of six wives shut up there."

Grel felt she must have said something "very stupid" to call forth such a reply, and by way of recovering her position, or at least improving her present standing, she said,

"I did not mean even to stand on the mat."

"I am quite aware *you* had no intention of transgressing any law, but I want to point out to you that I feel grateful for your forbearance. Curiosity is said to be a feminine foible; I cannot aver this of my own knowledge, but I shall have it in my power to say for the rest of my life that I have had the pleasure of knowing one lady who put aside this weakness, and who turned away with her curiosity ungratified."

By this time they had walked the whole length of the saloon, and now stepped out of the open window on to the flowery lawn.

"Then perhaps you do not blame me much?" said she innocently, and feeling herself very happy in his company.

"Blame! how can you suppose I could ever attach blame to you?" Mr. Maynooth was evidently less on his guard than he had been, and that same expression again lighted up his features that Grel had so wonderingly observed early in their conversation.

"Now, tell me, do you not think this a very charming bouquet?" said she.

This was a little ruse on the part of "Maidenhood"—Grel wanted time to analyze her thoughts, and to think over this change in Mr. Maynooth's expressive countenance. It reminded her of an alabaster vase with a lighted lamp inside. She afterwards acknowledged to herself, "His face glowed like the face of an angel!" And so "Maidenhood" spontaneously had recourse to a ruse to change the subject and give herself time to ascertain her "whereabouts" at that moment. If she had been questioned, "Maidenhood" was too much astray in her thoughts to reply correctly. But—if we admit that "Maidenhood" is in so hapless a trouble as to be unable to tell if she stand on her head or her feet—"Manhood" is up to the mark. Mr. Maynooth saw his advantage, and enjoyed it—nay, more, as a matter of propriety, he followed the lady's lead, and replied to her query, but he kept his own eyes wide open while convincing her they were closed.

"Harrison is very arbitrary ; I suppose all really good men of the horticultural class are. If he were to permit my aunt and myself and Yolande to cut flowers how and when we please, we should soon have none to cut, because we cannot know, as he does, who makes flowers his study, which plant will be benefited by cutting, and which by being left untouched."

"Manhood" made this long speech in a well-chosen hum-drum sort of tone, in the gracious hope that "Maidenhood" might happily recover her respiration and feel more at ease. And Grel did recover ; but how much soever "Raymond's forget-me-nots" looked eagerly at the lady, he never caught sight again during that short stroll of Grel's "blue violets."

"Yolande thought this bouquet lovely, but I could not persuade her to make an exchange—to take mine and let me have hers," said Grel.

"You do not care for flowers?" said Mr. Maynooth.

Evidently Grel's great indignation at this supposition prompted her to raise her eyes to his, and by their mute expression deny the shameful accusation, but she thought better of the matter, and dropped the heavy lids before her eyes had accomplished one half of the distance. She said, however, in firm tones,

"Do you judge me by yourself?—do not you love flowers?"

"Indeed I do. Allow me to look at the bouquet

in your hand. Go and fetch Harrison," said he, to a man at work down one of the side walks.

"I do not wish to go further from the house," said Grel.

"No; I will take you back to the drawing-room, and bring you another bouquet."

"Another! indeed this is most charming! I did not mean to find fault; quite the reverse."

"Now, do you really think it is necessary to tell me that?—do I not know your amiability, your——" but they had re-entered the saloon, and Grel heard no more; and when her companion retreated to the lawn she suffered her thoughts to dwell upon him and herself as they were situated towards each other at that moment.

"What could be the matter either with herself or Mr. Maynooth, or both?" thought she. He had again spoken in those same mellifluous tones that thrilled through every nerve and took away her respiration! How she longed to be alone—alone in her own apartment, free from the intrusion she must expect in the saloon. Once again impulsively she rose and hastened to the door, all across the ante-room, through the great hall, and up the spiral stairs, and through the long corridors she ran to her own room. She fastened the door, and then asked herself, "What is the matter?—I am sure I do not know. Something seems to alarm me, and make me wish to be alone. I am not unhappy—nay, I feel a pleasurable sensation that is new to me, that I cannot account for or

explain!" She caught sight of herself in a mirror; she stopped to look, and wondered "if she looked well"—she feared *not* well. "Dear me! how I do wish I could look rather nice! Why do I wear this simple muslin? I declare I look like a school-girl!" "Maidenhood" pouted, and instinctively wished she had been better attired. "But I am very foolish to wish these things—that is, to be better attired and to look well." She clasped her hands in a pretty sort of despair as she remembered Yolande had told her, "Raymond says Zara Barrymore is quite like a queen among other ladies."

She seated herself, and sat musing. The windows were wide open; she heard the roll of carriage wheels and the tread of horses' feet down the avenue, and started up.

"The Barrymores! I must go."

She bathed her forehead with some strong essence as she said,

"My head, my poor head! What *can* have given me so severe a headache all in a minute? But I must go."

She took another survey of herself in a large mirror, but she was not satisfied with her appearance.

"I think I know now why Brenda Cheetham feels vexed that her figure is so short and herself so stout. I am sure *I* wish I was as handsome and as queenly among ladies as Zara Barrymore."

"Maidenhood" was utterly unconscious of, or

perhaps even despised, her own real attractions. Again she went along the corridors and down the stairs, but this time slowly. When she entered the saloon, Mr. Maynooth stood in the centre of the room, his tall figure stretched up to its full height, and in his hand, high above his head, he held a bouquet. Mr. and Miss Barrymore and Yolande, who surrounded him, seemed to her to be all laughing and all talking together. Certainly there was an unusual hubbub. Mistress Nuala was seated at the upper end of the saloon. A silence seemed suddenly to fall upon the room as she entered, and the Barrymores came forward to greet her. She then seated herself by Mistress Nuala, who said,

“Zara has been telling Raymond she will steal that beautiful bouquet.”

Grel saw the bouquet was very lovely. She herself looked upon it with longing eyes, but she only said,

“Miss Barrymore need not wish ‘to steal.’ I am sure Mr. Maynooth is so kind, if he thinks she wishes for it he will give it her.”

“I am not sure of it; indeed I know he made Harrison cut it for you.”

“Because I did not enter his sanctum? Do you think he wishes to reward me? Is that the reason he means to offer it to me?”

“Maidenhood” saw no value in herself alone; she looked down upon her “school-girl” white muslin, and finished these queries with a sigh.

"He has not told any of us his reason, my dear; he——"

But now Mr. Maynooth approached, and Grel felt her cheeks glow, in spite of her most ladylike efforts to look "as if she did not care the least bit in the world."

"Tell me if you like this," said he.

"Indeed I thought the first bouquet exquisitely beautiful. I told you so. I am quite ashamed to——"

He seated himself by her side, holding the bouquet for her inspection.

"But you have not told me. Do you like this?"

"Yes, very much."

"Then, exchange is no robbery. I have your first bouquet. You will accept this in lieu of it?"

"Thanks, thanks; and you will give the other to Yolande?"

"I did not say so."

Dinner was announced. Mr. Barrymore took Mistress Nuala, and Mr. Maynooth followed with the Lady Grel, Zara and Yolande bringing up the rear.

In a day or two after this Grel returned to Prellsthorpe Rectory.

CHAPTER XVI.

“IN THE FAIR TALE IS A FOUL FALSITY.”

“INNOCENCE IS NO PROTECTION.”

AT Prellsthorpe Rectory certain things had happened that were hard to be understood by the good Rector. A man of much cultivation of mind, and spending the greater portion of his time in his library among his beloved books, it came to pass that he seldom saw what was actually passing before his very eyes. The eyes of his body were either occupied in exploring the minds of others—in books—or closed to present objects while he ruminated at meals, or at other times, upon the honey he had gathered from the various hives at his command. He knew Lord Danby made loud demonstrations of love for his cousin Lady Grel, and he always felt a keen desire to keep his library door locked when he heard the sound of Lord Danby's voice in the house. The good man thought Lord Danby had not fulfilled the promise of his boyhood, but though he sighed over this conviction, he said nothing to any one.

The Rector observed that during Grel's absence Lord Danby's visits were as frequent as when she was at home, and if this caused him a little astonishment at first he soon ceased to think of it, for Lord Danby's movements were seldom to be accounted for. Mrs. Cheetham had also noticed this fact.

She made no remark, because she was so accustomed to see him enter the house at all hours, just when he pleased, and retire in like manner, that, though she too wondered he came so constantly when Grel was not at home, she was not made uncomfortable thereby.

But on one occasion Mrs. Cheetham had started on her customary trip to the village, and returned unexpectedly for something she had forgotten. She entered the drawing-room, and there saw Brenda and Lord Danby so apparently entranced in the society of each other as to shut out from their eyes and ears all heterogeneous sounds and sights. She stood motionless and silent in their presence for a second or two before they either of them discovered this intrusion. Convicted as they were from ocular demonstration, for Lord Danby's arm was round Brenda's waist, her head resting on his shoulder, they did not attempt to deny the fact. Brenda herself was more glad than sorry. She had long burned in secret to have her engagement made known to the world, and thus secure her treasure. But Lord Danby shook his head as he arose and said,

"Mistress Cheetham ! The lady spy. I had not calculated on this. You know you consented we should 'run away together,' now add to that kindness on your part *one* more—just consent to be blind for the nonce."

"I consent that you should run away ! How can you accuse me so wrongfully ?"

Lord Danby again shook his head as he attempted to take her hand, while he explained,

“At the Abbey fête!—now you cannot have forgotten?—I told you Brenda and I meant to run away; you laughed *then*, and shook your ladylike head, and *then* I told you never to deny that you were in our secret, and had given your consent! And now—*now*, Mistress Cheetham, ‘the lady spy’ means to be untrue to her word, does she?”

Almost gasping for breath in her indignation at Lord Danby’s words, Mrs. Cheetham liberated her hand, which she had passively allowed him to take, and said,

“I thought you were amusing yourself at my expense by talking arrant nonsense!”

“You paid *me* a high compliment, and quite outwitted yourself. You *know* I always speak the truth. However, good morning; I will go. You see Brenda is here; we have not run away yet—for the present I leave her in your care, while I make preparations for our flight. Good-bye, darling,” continued he, carressing Brenda in spite of Mrs. Cheetham’s presence, “my lady mother farewell.”

And he left the house.

Mrs. Cheetham naturally felt annoyed that Lord Danby should accuse her of understanding and consenting to any engagement between Brenda and himself; or that she should be supposed cognizant of their intention to “run away.” And the Rector could not understand what had happened!

Brenda avoided all possible conversation with her father, except in Mrs. Cheetham's presence; and at these times she contrived cleverly to mystify him, and covertly to implicate Mrs. Cheetham—who could not deny that Lord Danby had indeed forewarned her of their intended escapade. These things caused the good man to be almost beside himself with astonishment.

Lord Danby ceased to make his appearance at the Rectory, but Brenda met him at all hours, and at any place he chose to indicate. Mr. Cheetham remonstrated with his daughter, and entreated that he might be spared the pain of locking her up a prisoner in her own room, and Mrs. Cheetham refused to undertake any responsibility in Brenda or her doings.

Very uncomfortable were the inmates of the Rectory at this period, none more so than the Rector himself. He was sadly troubled in mind for the future of his beloved child, whose fate, he felt sure, would be an unhappy one if she persisted in her wish to marry Lord Danby.

Brenda herself, whose intercourse with her lover had been more constant and more unrestrained during Grel's absence, had had more real enjoyment of Lord Danby's society than beforetime had been possible. And now she fully confided in his statement—"that he was only toying with his cousin Grel, and throwing dust in the eyes of lookers on."

But when, by the accident of Mrs. Cheetham's

return, the engagement between the two was discovered, and the lovers could only meet occasionally in the grounds of the Rectory or of the Park : Brenda's source of happiness was stopped for the time being, and her mind unsettled by her father's displeasure and the uncomfortableness of her home.

Then Brenda entreated Lord Danby to put an end at once to their difficulties by making proposals to her father. In vain Lord Danby reminded her that he was already engaged—that he was engaged before he came to Prellsthorpe—to the Lady Gwendoline Saint Vincent ; Brenda was always ready with her heartless reply, “But you know, D., she will die ; you know you are only waiting until this event takes place, to marry me : you have told me so thousands of times.”

It never seemed to enter into Brenda's calculations that the Lady Gwendoline might be permitted to live !

At length Lord Danby replied in a fashion that satisfied Brenda for the time.

“Ren shall call and put it all right. I will not see the ‘old buffer’ myself. There, Brenda, that *must* do for the present,” added he in a positive tone, and Brenda was compelled to be satisfied for the time being ; but she left him on this occasion with a swelling heart and an unhappy mind.

Nevertheless Lord Danby kept his word, and Lady Irene called at the Rectory. She only asked for Mrs. Cheetham, and explained to her, in strict confidence—

“That her father had wished Lord Danby to marry the Lady Gwendoline Saint Vincent, the daughter of the duke of — ; that unfortunately her ladyship had fallen ill of consumption, and she was not expected to recover. Until her death was announced—and, indeed, for a decent time afterwards, Lord Danby’s engagement with another must not be made known. Irene hoped, under the “sad necessity of the case,” that the two lovers might stand excused!—and that Lord Danby’s honourable proposals to the good Rector for the hand of his charming daughter might be allowed to ‘stand over’ until the coast was clear.”

It was not difficult to mystify Mrs. Cheetham ; but the Rector himself was indignant and displeased. He strongly pointed out to his infatuated daughter the cold-hearted, and, indeed, *bad* conduct of Lord Danby towards the Lady Gwendoline—who, lying at the point of death, still trusted in his love, still clung to earth, probably for his sake, who had virtually cast her off !

The Rector’s resentment did not alter Brenda’s opinions, or change her behaviour. She had known of Lord Danby’s engagement with the Lady Gwendoline at the very time, that she saw him profess love for his cousin Grel, and that he also whispered into her willing and ever open ear his love for herself.

Let us charitably hope this phase of “Maidenhood” occurs but seldom.

Brenda Cheetham was several years older than

the Lady Grel; they had both had the same training, and each turned out differently. Brenda, if she were not absolutely bold in society, had at all times a certain self-possession and self-confidence that jar on the nerves of better-bred people. But Grel, if she had less self-possession than was necessary to the formation of strength, was always deferential to those older than herself; and if timid in character, at least firm in principle, and always refined in manner.

When "Maidenhood" can see a gentleman pay court to one, know him engaged to another, and yet credit his vows to herself, it might be conjectured she is either very silly, or very vain, or even both. But Brenda Cheetham was not "silly." She was a long-headed, far-seeing, clever, unscrupulous person. She cared not how much Gwendoline and Grel suffered, so that she herself was secure. Indeed, she had a keen and almost savage delight in the knowledge that they—the born nobility of the land—would be put aside for her, and that, as Countess of Prellsthorpe, she would take precedence of both. But Brenda forgot, as such specimens of "Maidenhood" do, that he who could deliberately deceive one, would be true to none.

Prellsthorpe Rectory had always been dull in the appreciation of the Lady Grel. But on her return from Wolfserag it was more than this—it was, to her, very uncomfortable. The triumph in which Brenda chose to indulge herself, relatively

to her positive engagement with Lord Danby, was of little moment to Grel; but Brenda's unfilial conduct shocked her, and made her home not only dull, but unhappy. A few days after her return she determined to go to the Park, and see her relatives—not that even this was actually pleasurable to Grel—perhaps she felt it a duty—but then almost any change was desirable, and after the enjoyment of Wolfscrag, of the new scenes, and the society of the Maynooths, she did not settle down very cosily to her former inactive life.

Rather slowly, and out of spirits, did she thread the mazes of the shrubbery walks, ere she came to the part that opened upon the Park. She began by conning over in her own mind how joyfully she had listened to the clanging of the joybells on the return of the Earl and Countess to Prellsthorpe. How eagerly she had longed for some change in her then quiet life!—how she had looked forward to companionship that would be of more value to her than Brenda Cheetham's, which latter had always been plentifully charged with satires and jealousies that had not added to her comfort! Longingly she had looked to Irene, who had seen and known so much of the world—longingly she had looked to her as to one who would change the whole current of her existence; and so she had, in one sense, for between her disappointment in Irene, and her dread of her cousin Danby, from a contented and humdrum

specimen of "Maidenhood," Grel had become always nervous, and often ill at ease.

But in due course of time she reached that very tree under which she had seated herself when, for the first time, she saw Mr. Maynooth so unexpectedly, and quite alone. Even her dog Bauer seemed to remember the circumstance, for he bounded forward, and careered round and round the tree, returning now and again to his young mistress, rushing back, and sniffing at the seat, as if he could still find traces of the pair who had once been seated there.

"Ah! Bauer, good dog, what a memory you have!" said she, stooping to pat his beautiful head.

The dog received the caress with every appearance of mute joy. Then he again bounded forward, and gave expression to his satisfaction in the very same glad bark with which he had greeted Mr. Maynooth's whistle, and attempt to cultivate a kindly feeling with him. But Grel said to herself—

"Memory, indeed!—upon what, or upon whom, am I suffering my mind to dwell?"

The very air seemed to have a pervading essence of his presence—at least, Grel felt it so. But why was she so changed?—she could not reply to the query. And now "Maidenhood" stopped in her walk. A colour came brightly into her cheeks; her heart beat loudly and quickly, respiration became difficult, and scarcely knowing what she expected, or if she were pleased

or terrified, she dared not lift her eyes and look around. What was it that so entranced her? She could not tell. She listened, still standing in that same position; she heard no footsteps—no silvery whistle filled the air with its melody; she gained courage, raised her head, and saw—Bauer seated on his haunches close by the seat under the tree. There were present only herself and Bauer. Why had she so foolishly agitated herself?—she did not answer.

“Maidenhood” seated herself under the tree, and patted Bauer’s handsome head, until he had had enough of mute caresses. Bauer was a sensible dog, and liked a little more notice than a mere *absent* pat of the hand. No—she was not thinking of Bauer. She was taking herself to task for her conduct when she was last seated under that tree. By some process of reasoning that probably belongs to the state of “Maidenhood,” she discovered that *she* had behaved very ill on that occasion, and Mr. Maynooth extremely well. In the first place, it was only a frank, hearty, and friendly feeling that caused him to seize her hand so energetically, and press it so fervently. And how was he to know that she wore diamond rings? Yolande had told her he had such a large, loving, and generous heart—of course she, Grel, had not known this when she sat there last, although she certainly must have known that he had not *intended* to hurt her, and yet what a fuss she had made!

“Ah! well,” said she with a deep sigh, “I wish I knew what to do on such difficult occasions. I thought he meant to be rude—what a mistake! He is, in truth, the most courteous and polished of all the gentlemen I have ever known—even Mr. Hamilton himself cannot surpass him in the manner and bearing of the high-bred gentleman!”

“Maidenhood” had plainly taken up the cudgel for Mr. Maynooth! She sat silently tracing circles in the grass with her parasol, and allowing herself to compare Mr. Hamilton with Mr. Maynooth. She could not make out a clear case against herself that she had really overturned one idol to set up another; she still believed in Mr. Hamilton’s infallibility; she had never heard one word against him that should cause her to dethrone him, and for his scornful and lofty behaviour to herself—that she excused, because she was sure he had misread her. Indeed, had he not promised “to break the laws for her” in his judgment of her when appearances were against her? No, Grel could not dethrone Mr. Hamilton from her secret shrine, but she thought she had another shrine that would just suit Mr. Maynooth. Upon that she would place him and silently worship him—when she had nothing better to do.

This state of musing was very pleasurable to Grel until after she had been seated, as it seemed to her, an unreasonable time “doing nothing,” and then she suddenly started into active life, alarmed at her own temerity. At that moment, too, she

was conscious of the approach of footsteps, crunching the gravel in the path, and apparently very near. She felt herself convicted of something, sitting there in the broad light of day tracing circles in the grass, but of what would this new-comer convict her? She dreaded to raise her eyes, fancying a foe in every sound, and humbled, ashamed, and subdued, she leaned against the tree and tried to shield her features from the intruder with her veil and parasol. She forgot that she had not spoken, and that her thoughts could not be read. If she had known which way, or how to get away, she would certainly have done so. But instead of attempting to escape she stood silently upbraiding herself for her unmaidenly folly in allowing her mind to be so pre-occupied, and every moment expectant of some voice—she had not time to make up her mind whose—but assuredly she might expect some voice to reproach her for her foolish conduct? Her very ears tingled with this sensitive dread of evil. Then Bauer came bounding back and barking. “It is he,” said she—her hope meant Mr. Maynooth. She turned; the footsteps were plainly in the walk that came from the Abbey, another moment, and Mr. Hamilton’s handsome figure loomed in sight. Grel was positively startled by the sight of the gentleman she least expected or wished to see at that moment. Mr. Hamilton, as it seemed to her, had the power to read her very thoughts; and though if he had known himself enshrined in her

memory he might have been more gratified than offended, Grel very naturally concluded that the reverse would be the case, and that, as Lord Danby had hinted to her some time previously, he would despise her for her unmaidenly presumption. Therefore, when Mr. Hamilton joined her, her manner was that of one conscious she has done wrong, and that he who so unexpectedly intruded himself upon her would *know* that she had done wrong.

Poor Grel ! she looked very guilty.

Mr. Hamilton very easily read these outward signs of a troubled conscience. Had he *again* disturbed her tête-à-tête with Mr. Maynooth?—or was she only waiting his coming to their place of “tryst?” He could not see Mr. Maynooth approaching anywhere through the broad glades of the park, though he made a point of looking round. If these two were really intending to meet again under that same tree whence he had once before dislodged them, he even hoped he should see him, that he might then have an excuse to take the liberty of telling the Lady Grel what he thought of her unladylike conduct !

Very stern thoughts crowded thick and fast into Mr. Hamilton’s mind. It is true he had spoken to the Lady Grel with his accustomed courtesy, and only on her own countenance betraying to him her own consciousness of error had his behaviour been altered from his ordinary manner to one very distant, and very lofty and cold. Mr.

HAMILTON had altogether forgotten his promise "to break the laws and show mercy to her when appearances were against her."

Sensitive "Maidenhood" was then the more convinced of her own folly and of Mr. Hamilton's penetration. She blushed a deeper scarlet, and became still more deeply agitated.

But now others appeared on the scene. Lord Danby and the Lady Irene were seen approaching. Grel's heart bounded for joy at this seasonable relief. Her shy and humbled manner did not alter, nor did the rosy blushes forsake her cheeks, but she welcomed her cousins with much more than her customary gladness, for of all the people on this bright and beautiful earth who had ever troubled the moments of the Lady Grel, this once most highly esteemed Mr. Hamilton had now become a terror and a dread.

Such are the changes in the life and opinions of "Maidenhood."

If "conscience is the chamber of justice," as the proverb saith, "Maidenhood" hath a large "chamber" in which she daily exercises her thoughts, her real knowledge, and her want of knowledge. Poor "Maidenhood!" In a specimen such as Grel "Maidenhood" sins very unconsciously, is a truthful confessor, and more ashamed and harassed by her own innocent peculiarities than the case deserves. Let us always judge "Maidenhood" charitably; for though there may be some specimens, like Brenda Cheetham, perhaps undeserving

of our regard, we will conclude that such are the "exceptions," and not the rule.

Grel's too evident blushes and too evident shyness struck both the new comers with the same idea—Mr. Hamilton had proposed. Neither, as each thought, could be blinded by Mr. Hamilton's ruse, for as soon as he had greeted the Lady Irene, he turned to Lord Danby, took his arm, and said,

"Come back with me to see the Earl ; I want you both to give me your united judgment before I drive into Stowe-in-the-Valley."

Mr. Hamilton was as eager now to get away from Grel and Mr. Maynooth, who he supposed would soon make his appearance, as he had before been anxious to lecture the Lady Grel. Irene joined Grel, and conversing on indifferent subjects the party soon arrived at the house. Grel's manner had become playful, now that her cousins had relieved her from the incubus of Mr. Hamilton's presence. But Irene saw under this happy gladness of manner, coupled with the shyness and rosy blushes when Grel first approached, Irene saw that she rejoiced, and in a confession of love from Mr. Hamilton. Both Irene and Lord Danby were much disconcerted by this *denouement*. As soon as Mr. Hamilton was closeted with the Earl, and Grel gone to the apartments of her aunt, Lord Danby contrived to return to his sister, and they both declared nothing was easier to read than Grel's position with Mr. Hamilton.

Irene declared she would not question Grel, because it was so very humiliating: and Lord Danby said "that Hamilton should prefer Grel to Irene was incomprehensible. Grel was such a little fool, and Irene was so superior in manner, in acquirements, in position, in wealth, in beauty, and in everything that could be coveted by man." But they mutually agreed to let the matter rest, not to make inquiries, but to be wide awake to anything that might happen next.

CHAPTER XVII.

"IT WILL BE ALL THE SAME A HUNDRED YEARS HENCE."

TIME sped, and the day arrived for the grand mask at Heraldstowe. The flowery lawns in the front of the house were on this occasion separated from the park by a temporary wire fence. Carriages set down at a side door, and Sir Hildebrand received in the south saloon. The reception rooms were all lighted, and decorated in the customary fashion on these occasions, but the large entrance hall—usually receiving so hospitably all comers to Heraldstowe, was now superseded in favour of the before-mentioned side-door, whence at once arrivals were ushered into the south saloon. This arrangement prevented the necessity for lighting up the great hall where the statues of the

barons stood in their picturesque panoplies, and Almeric and Zara longed for a bright full moon on this particular night, that the radiant colours of the translucent glass might cover all things with rich hues, and create a fairy scene for the time being—a scene that should charm the eyes of their friends without awakening any of the sort of awe they had each felt, when on their midnight vigil and in darkness they had first realized the moonlight beauties of the great hall.

Miss Barrymore had originally intended to have the barons removed to suitable sites on the lawns or shrubberies, but independent of the great additional trouble this arrangement would give, she afterwards thought the wonderful effects of light and shadow in the hall at midnight, and with a favourable moon, would prove the greater novelty. The hall doors stood wide open, and, as we have said, the moon was gracious, and her light brilliant, the barons certainly looked their best, and the fête opened well.

When the Cheethams arrived with the Lady Grel, we need scarcely say that all was new to her. Down the long covered passage from the entrance stood rows of domestics on each side, in fancy dresses, but without masks. Sir Hildebrand had allowed his own establishment, and all other servants belonging to his friends, and likely to be present, to assume any character, but *not* to mask. The farmers on the Heraldstowe estate, with their wives, and sons and daughters, were allowed

the same privilege, with the same restrictions. The housekeeper, seated in state in the servants' hall, assisted by Palmer, began her receptions long before Sir Hildebrand, and now these early and unmasked arrivals crowded round the entrance or lined the passages, and watched carriages set down their freights. The generality of the wives and daughters of the farmers had loaded themselves with finery of all kinds, but the farmers themselves for the most part appeared in their ordinary Sunday suits. Some of the young men of the best standing in this class were more ambitious, and an occasional "Robin Hood," or gallant "officer," might be seen in the press that stood outside the temporary wire fence; for that, in addition to being unmasked, was another restriction upon the tenantry and domestics, viz., "that inside the fence should be sacred to Sir Hildebrand's personal friends."

Sir Hildebrand, as King Henry VIII., and Mistress Nuala Maynooth, in plain attire, and both unmasked, were seated in the south saloon. Will Somers, King Henry's jester, and masked, also assisted Sir Hildebrand to receive. From the saloon the guests passed on through the moonlighted hall to the ball-room.

Brenda Cheetham was in the act of scolding Grel for some act of gross simplicity, when the attention of the two ladies was arrested by the entrance of a gorgeously dressed Turk. "The imperial aigrette of heron's feathers in his fez,

denoted his rank ; they were fastened by a diamond button, formed of many diamonds of the finest water. His diamond hilted sword was sheathed in a gold scabbard encrusted with diamonds, and girdled round his waist by a gold belt, fastened with a diamond clasp in the shape of a crescent."

The three were in the ante-room leading into the saloon, the grooms of the chambers stood respectfully awaiting their cards to announce them.

"Saban serula," said the Turk, as he bent his head to the ladies.

"The Commander of the Faithful, the Caliph Haroun Alraschid," shouted the groom, as the folding doors opened wide, and the gentleman passed on.

"A real Turk, Brenda!—only think of that," said Grel.

"A real donkey!" said Brenda with a sneer.

"Ninetta, an Italian Contadina," said the groom.

"Her Majesty the Queen of the May."

Brenda, angry at the man for adding "her majesty" to her title, might have been thankful for the mask that concealed the dark workings of her countenance, while the simple "Contadina" deserved to have been *unmasked*, that all might have seen and appreciated the pleasure she had in the scene.

"Oh! dear Aunt Nuala, how very glad I am to see you!" said Grel. "Who are all these people?"

And she looked around with much wonder, and some awe.

"Grel, love, you must change your voice, it will betray you; and strange as 'all these people' may appear to you, remember you look equally 'strange' in your change of costume."

"'Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt,' " was now announced, and all eyes were turned upon the new comer.

"'The Princess Lalla Rookh;' 'The Grand Chamberlain Fadladeen;' 'The Poet Feramorz.' " Murmurs of satisfaction and admiration were whispered by the lookers on, and the "Cleopatra" escaped further notice at the time. But gradually the guests passed on through the entrance hall. "The Commander of the Faithful" had preceded Brenda and Grel even here, and when they entered, he was standing rapt in admiration of the scene. Innumerable seemed the masked figures strolling leisurely among the fountains and flowers. And a gay and many-coloured crowd of many feet deep pressed round the wire that severed the guests from the domestics and tenantry. The moon shone brightly, the many hues from the stained glass fell now here, now there, upon this statue and that, the large steel mirrors did their duty by mystically shadowing forth the company in the hall; the barons stood quiet, each in his proper position; it was yet early in the evening, perhaps they were making up their minds to a good carouse at a later hour! The two young ladies

and the "grand Turk," as Grel called the gentleman in a Turkish costume, had stood some minutes silently admiring the hall and the scene on the lawn, when two figures slowly walked past the open doors, and Grel laughed as she said to Brenda,

"Dear Mr. and Mrs. Cheetham, how well they look !"

"Cardinal Wolsey," and—by some curious anachronism—"Queen Elizabeth" hanging on his arm, were the two figures Grel had noticed.

But now the "grand Turk" turned on his heel, and offered his arm to Grel. Unfortunately Grel glided away, and Brenda accepted his courtesy. Mistress Nuala Maynooth had entered the hall, and Grel—without meaning to be rude to so great and well-known a character as the "Caliph Haroun Alraschid," indeed, she was unaware of his proffered attention—went to meet her old friend.

"Come with me," said Mistress Nuala, linking Grel's arm within her own, "we will stand at the door and look out upon the lawns ; one has seldom seen a more fairy-like scene." Grel admitted she never had seen anything so lovely before. Presently she started, and grasped the arm of her companion. "What alarms you, dear?" said Mistress Nuala.

"That Giant ! I am not alarmed ; but do look at him, is he a real man ?"

"Yes, my dear. Zara determined to leave the barons on their pedestals ; and, indeed, I know all

the armour in the house remains untouched, exactly as we always see it at Heraldstowe. That gigantic figure appears motionless, one might conclude that——”

“How the crowd admire him,” said Grel, interrupting. “He must be very vain!”

“He cannot prevent their admiration, my dear.”

“But if he be really a living man, he need not stand so still when he sees people admire him. I am sure I should go away immediately.”

“Very likely, my dear, for you are a delicate and refined young lady, and he is a great tall man—as you say, quite a giant.”

“Who can he be? What splendid armour he wears.”

Other lady maskers now joined Mistress Nuala and Grel.

“Cleopatra” proved to be Miss Barrymore, for the ladies did not affect to mystify—but rather to assist each other—and “Medora” in the person of Lady Irene, and Sara Thorn as the greatly admired “Lalla Rookh,” came forward to ask Mistress Nuala’s opinion; who it will be remembered, as in part taking upon her the character of hostess, and assisting Sir Hildebrand—was *unmasked*.

The ladies took counsel from each other, and decided then and there “who was who” among the gentlemen masked.

Between “Haroun Alraschid” and the motionless “giant” in armour the ladies were divided in opinion. There were no others present so tall,

therefore it followed as a matter of course one *must* be that cynosure in every eye—the master of Prellsthorpe Abbey, Mr. Hamilton; the other the master of Mitreberis even, Mr. Maynooth.

“Mr. Maynooth is the taller of the two,” said Irene.

“Then the giant must be he,” said Sara Thorn.

“The ‘Commander of the Faithful’ looks the latter to me,” said Miss Barrymore, with a hearty wish to put her friends on the right track, because she knew that Raymond Maynooth had a goodly store of jewels brought from all countries during his past travels, and in her own mind she felt sure Raymond was now personating “Haroun.”

“I think that stately giant must be Mr. Hamilton,” said Grel; “I do not think Mr. Maynooth could possibly stand motionless for such a length of time—he is too good-natured.”

The ladies laughed and agreed “Grel’s opinion was very much to the point.”

“Look—look!” said Grel, “he moves. Now he looks like Mr. Hamilton, does he not?”

“The armour undoubtedly adds to his height,” said Miss Barrymore; “and, as you say, his motions are very majestic.”

“How slowly he moves,” said Irene; “his steel shoes—sollerets, I mean—perhaps encumber his movements.”

“His heavy armour does, I should think,” said Miss Thorn.

“Then now we determine that the ‘Giant’ is

Mr. Hamilton, the 'Caliph' Mr. Maynooth, 'Feramorz, Lord Danby, and——"

"No, no" interrupted Miss Barrymore; "Almeric is 'Feramorz.'"

"The 'Giant' is looking for some one," said Mistress Nuala.

"So he is," said Irene. "I shall retire for the present." Sara Thorn went with her, and Miss Barrymore passed through the hall to the saloon to see Sir Hildebrand.

"Why do they run away from Mr. Hamilton?" said Grel.

"Disguise your voice, my love, when you speak. And now to reply to your question. I do not think they wish to avoid him, he is a great favourite with all ladies, but perhaps they want to get up some change in their voices; yours quite betrays you."

By this time the knight had, to use Lady Grel's expression, "stalked" up to the entrance-doors, and there he stood silently awaiting the end of the whispered conference between the two ladies.

"I hope he will not ask me to go with him," said Grel, in some natural fear of a tête-à-tête with Mr. Hamilton.

"But if he asks you must not refuse," said Aunt Nuala.

"Then will you go with me, dear aunt?" said Grel despondingly.

"Certainly not. You must accept his proffered courtesy if he do proffer, and do your best to act your part as a 'Contadina.'"

"I cannot 'act'—I can only be myself. What a pity I came! And yet I could enjoy it so if only people would let me!"

"Mr. Hamilton will *not* know you; your change of dress and the mask quite conceal you—I mean no one will know you as 'Lady Grel' unless your own voice betrays its mistress."

"May it please your ladyship," said the Giant, addressing Mistress Nuala, "to allow me an introduction to your pretty handmaiden?"

"My memory is *not* so good as it has been, sir knight. I do not recollect your name and title."

The knight, kneeling on one knee, went through a long string of names and titles, much to Grel's extreme surprise, not one of which had she ever heard before. Mistress Nuala listened graciously. The knight arose from his kneeling position, and Mistress Nuala introduced Grel as "Ninetta."

"Does this charming scene strike you as very different from your own sunny land?" said he to Grel.

"Different! It is the most fairy-like and beautiful scene I have ever seen. But I am in my own land—I never was in Italy in my life," said Grel.

The knight bowed, but Mistress Nuala turned to Grel and said,

"You are in the dress of an Italian peasant; of course the knight presumes 'Italy' is your native land."

"I never thought of that," said Grel, regretfully looking at her dress.

“Will you allow me the honour of a promenade in this bright moonlight?” said the knight to Grel.

She accepted his arm—she knew she could not refuse.

“And now,” thought she, “I do wonder whatever he will say to me, for I am sure more than once he has felt greatly annoyed with me or something about me that I could not help.”

Grel sighed heavily, but her companion did not seem to notice this. Meanwhile, when Miss Barrymore re-appeared, the “Grand Turk” came to the entrance-hall, and, offering his arm, they walked away together.

“How extremely well Mr. Hamilton looks, does he not?” said she.

“Where is he?” said her companion, looking round.

“There, with that pretty Contadina.”

“Is that Hamilton! The lady is——”

“Oh! Raymond,” said Miss Barrymore laughing, “you know she is Grel Stuart. How extremely well you disguise your voice; you need not do so with me.”

“Then I should forget when I have the Lady Grel on my arm; and though I do not much care, you will say, for mystifying *you*, so constant a friend, perhaps I should spoil my own sport in the case of Grel.”

“Now, tell me, Raymond, did you not mistake me for Irene? I have not yet made out which you really prefer, Irene or Grel? Did not you

mistake me for Irene? I chose this dress on purpose."

"On purpose that I might mistake you for the Lady Irene!"

"You, indeed! As if I cared for you, Raymond! I chose this costume, and dressed myself after the picture of Cleopatra at Prellsthorpe Park, on purpose that all might mistake me for the Lady Irene."

"Then if you do not care for me, you do care for some one?"

"That is not a fair question, Raymond," said Miss Barrymore, with a little sigh; "nevertheless, I have no objection to tell you that my heart and soul are for the present wrapped up in dear Almeric, and in the hope of his recovery, poor fellow. I never think of making conquests, as some do."

"Your friend, Lady Grel, for instance?"

"No, Raymond; I know but little of Grel. Some ladies make conquests because they cannot help it—like Irene and Sara Thorn; some long for conquest, more like Yolande, Raymond; some have not time for such sunny pleasures, like myself and Sarah Fortescue—for she has her mother to nurse, and I have my dear grandfather and Almeric."

"There are two young ladies still unmentioned in your list of 'conquerers,' or otherwise, the Lady Grel and Miss Cheetham."

"Raymond, I have noticed lately you like to

make me talk about Grel. And really, though she is so pretty and innocent, and all that, she is almost too simple-minded for me, and certainly too nervous—she wants self-reliance. But Brenda Cheetham——”

“Yes—what does she require?”

“There she goes with Lord Dundreary—not that I ought to have told you, and so you must please to forget——”

“The Queen of the May?”

“Yes; and between ourselves, Raymond, all the artfulness of character is with Brenda, and all the simplicity with Grel; and if they two could be rolled together, and then divided, they would both benefit.”

“Ah! you are very satirical.”

And now a new group was seen on the lawn. A small tent of crimson and gold had been pitched near to the great fountain; the silken curtains were drawn aside, and Sir Hildebrand, as “King Henry VIII.,” was seated under the awning. On one side “Queen Katharine of Arragon,” on the other “Queen Elizabeth,” in her stiffly-starched ruff and richly-embroidered stomacher; these ladies were Mrs. Fortescue and Mrs. Cheetham. “Will Somers” was also present in his motley dress.

“Dates are out of fashion,” said Lord Dundreary, as he leaned on the back of Queen Elizabeth’s chair, “or else you and your father reigned at the same time.”

"You, my lord, are the greatest anachronism at my court," said the king.

"I was born an anachronism, and it was my mother's fault. Eh! was it not?" said Lord Dundreary to Lalla Rookh, who stood near.

"If your mother must answer for all your faults, will she not have enough to do?" said she.

At a moderate distance from the tent stood the knight in armour and the Lady Grel Stuart leaning on his arm.

"Oh! Goody, how you did startle me!" said Grel, clinging to the knight's arm, and turning to speak to an old crone who wanted to tell her fortune.

"Will you tell mine?" said the knight.

"I will do better," said the crone.

She deliberately cut off a knot of ribands from Grel's dress, and gave to him.

"Take these," said she—"all true knights wear the colours of their lady-love."

"Mr. Hamilton, pray excuse her," said Grel; "she probably does not know you."

The knight, meanwhile, fastened the knot in front of his helmet.

"You must not call me Mr. Hamilton," said he; "for though I have no intention of disputing the accuracy of your knowledge, others may not be so well informed, and I may chance to——"

"We all know you," interrupted Grel.

"Do you know me, my dear young lady?" said the old crone.

"Are you dear Aunt Nuala?"

"If you mean Mistress Nuala Maynooth," said the knight, "I saw her standing near Sir Hildebrand's chair only a minute or two since."

"That is true," thought Grel, but she did not speak.

Isaac, the Jew, came up with a Sibyl leaning on his arm.

"You are entering my domain, old woman," said the Sibyl to the fortune-teller.

"Not I," retorted she—"I stand upon my own ground."

"Your ground!" said the Jew—"do you mean to say your tricks and the Sibyl's are different?"

"Yes, inasmuch as that I make bright hits at present things; she makes weird denunciations on the future."

"Suppose we ask the Sibyl to prophesy?" said the knight.

"And I will take notes thereof for my next poem," said Feramorz, twanging his lute.

"And I will review the poem," said Fadladeen, "in the Samarcandibeg Gazette."

"Learned Sibyl, allow me to offer you a seat," said the Caliph Haroun Alraschid.

"And if you stand upon the seat, and read to us your wonderful books, all your learning will come from on high," said Isaac the Jew.

"Isaac, I pray thee do not jest upon sacred things," said Cardinal Wolsey; and Isaac, bending his head, drew back from the immediate press.

The characters began to crowd round the Sibyl, but Lord Dundreary said,

“Why do they not come to us?—we cannot go to them.”

And then “Will Somers” came with “commands” from King Henry that the Sibyl would come nearer to the tent. She was then desired to stand upon a high pedestal, purposely placed in front of the tent.

“You, Madam Fortune-teller,” said the Sibyl, with a sneer, “if you make some hits, will have some falls. You pretend to predict the future of others. You cannot foresee your own fate.”

“Two of a trade can never agree, Gossip,” said Will Somers to the king. “And wonders will never cease—the young Sibyl is jealous of the old crone.”

“I thought all Sibyls were old, Will,” said the king.

“I suppose I may be allowed to ask to what the gracious Sibyl alludes when she says I cannot foresee my own fate?” said the fortune-teller.

“You will lose your present home in a few months.”

The Sibyl had certainly penetrated the disguise of the fortune-teller, who was Mistress Nuala Maynooth, and who, if Mr. Maynooth should marry, would have to resign Wolfscrag.

“Is she going to be married?” said Dundreary; “if she is, I suppose she will marry Isaac the Jew.”

He, therefore, had *not* penetrated either disguise,

for Lord Prellsthorpe personated Isaac the Jew.

"Never mind," said the Contadina to the poor fortune-teller, "if you are in trouble, I will help you. It would be cruel to turn you out of your home."

"Many a true word is spoken in jest," said the knight, as he took the knot of ribands from his helmet, and respectfully kissed it before he replaced it.

It seems that the knight is fully as learned as the Sibyl, for if Mr. Maynooth married the Lady Grel, she would certainly become the very person whose duty in some measure it would be to try and make Mistress Nuala's change of residence as agreeable as she could.

"Poor peasant girls must beware of powerful knights," said the Sibyl.

The Lady Grel did not understand, but King Henry laughed gleefully as he heard the prophecy. Grel had not changed her individuality with her toilette. She still felt herself "Grel Stuart," and *not* a poor peasant girl. She looked on innocently enough, but the courtly crowd saw more than she saw, and many were the smiles and nods at Grel's expense.

"Do not act by her advice," whispered the knight, stooping to the Lady Grel.

"She did not mean me," said Grel, artlessly.

"The Commander of the Faithful is weaving a net, and the Queen of Egypt must beware of the Caliph Haroun Alraschid," said the Sibyl, as she

pointed with her wand to where the "Grand Turk" stood with Miss Barrymore on his arm.

All eyes were instantly turned on the pair, but Irene thought, "Can it be that Mr. Maynooth is indeed making love to Miss Barrymore?" At all events, the ladies generally thought this a capital hit, and the Sibyl continued—

"Cardinal Wolsey might be better occupied looking after Queens of the May than other more mighty Queens."

Queen Katharine did not seem to understand; Anne Boleyn was not present, and Queen Elizabeth (Mrs. Cheetham), shook her head, and hid her face behind her fan. The Sibyl had again penetrated through the disguise of masks and dresses, for Mr. Cheetham wore the robes of the Cardinal, and his daughter was the Queen of the May. Lord Dundreary (Lord Danby) appeared to be whispering soft nothings into the little Queen's ear, but the Cardinal, good man, *saw* nothing unusual in that, on the occasion of fêtes like the present. He did not even sigh with premonitory wisdom; all learned as he certainly was, he enjoyed the pageant and the fun and frolic of the hour.

Meanwhile Grel found two fortune-tellers at her elbow, and, to use the knight's expression, she "could not tell t'other from which."

"I must go," said one, as she turned to leave the crowd, "but I leave my sister to take my place."

Grel would have questioned the new arrival, but again the Sibyl spoke, and all turned to listen.

“For Medora there is no Corsair, for a May Queen no coronet, for Rosalind no Orlando, for Ivanhoe no Rowena, for Isaac the Jew no daughter Rebecca, for Harlequin no Columbine.”

“Oh! oh! my lady Sibyl,” said Harlequin, starting into active life, and flourishing his wand. The crowd opened. He touched the old fortune-teller, and in a second her hat fell off, her cloak was thrown back, and out stepped Columbine.

This was loudly applauded, and as Harlequin and Columbine went away dancing in and out of the flower-beds and round the fountains, Fadladeen said, “You are out in your ‘hits,’ my lady Sibyl; posterity will not honour you.”

“Then we leave to you the pleasure of criticising our prophecies to your heart’s content.”

“She ‘hit’ you there, Mr. Fall-lall,” said Will Somers.

The Sibyl descended from her high place, and the Royal party seated under the silken awning thanked her much for her exertions on this auspicious occasion. The company began to promenade, and, as Dundreary said, “to change places,” for now Queen Cleopatra was seen leaning on the arm of the “Giant,” and the pretty Contadina was nowhere to be seen.

“Everything is going off remarkably well,” said the knight.

“Ah! you are kind to tell me so,” said the Queen; “but, indeed, I did not think you would recognise me masked.”

"Why should I not, Zara? And, besides, you forget I lent you those large pear-shaped pearls, on purpose to make your Cleopatra dress complete."

"Raymond Maynooth! Oh heavens! Raymond, I mistook you for Mr. Hamilton."

"Exactly so; and I find everybody has paid me the same compliment; even Yolande did not know me when I insisted upon giving her a few hints for her character of Sibyl. But as I am two inches taller than Hamilton, *he* ought to feel gratified. And yet I admit that dress becomes him admirably, and makes him look much above his actual height."

"Raymond, Raymond, what shall I do? Do you not see my distress? I mistook that 'Grand Turk,' as Grel calls him, for you, and talked to *him* as confidently as I would to you."

"I daresay you said no harm."

"But he is so particular. I was playful and sincere, as I always am in my unrestrained talks with you, whom I have known from my childhood. If I had thought I had been in conversation with that stately and reserved Mr. Hamilton, I should have been stately and reserved too."

"He is not understood, Zara."

"No; because he is so proud, and so——"

"It is not pride; indeed he is a kind-hearted and noble fellow."

"You would think so, Raymond, if he carried off Grel, would you not?"

The knight started perceptibly enough to lookers on, and then he said in an altered tone,

"Now, Zara, do tell me what you mean?"

Supper was announced, and the Queen said,

"Pray leave me, Raymond, and look after Grel."

"God bless you!" said the knight, as he resigned her to the care of Isaac the Jew, and with long and hasty strides went his way.

But just as he caught sight of several ladies in a cluster together, and distinguished the Contadina among them, the tall Turk came up, and offering his arm, the prize was borne away from before his sight.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"FACE TO FACE THE TRUTH COMES OUT."

WE have seen that the "Caliph Haroun Alraschid" appropriated Grel, and led her into the banquetting-room.

"And so you have bestowed your colours on the knight," said he to Grel, as they slowly made their way through the crowd.

"No," said Grel, simply. "The old fortune-teller cut off a knot from my dress, and gave them to the knight—to Mr. Hamilton; I apologized to him at the time."

The mask concealed the features of the "Commander of the Faithful," and Grel did not know how much he enjoyed her simplicity.

"Did you observe the device on his shield? I need not ask the question, it was so commonly a subject of conversation—you with others must have noticed it."

"I only saw the knight and talked to him."

"He would be much gratified with the concentration of your thoughts upon himself!"

"Mr. Hamilton! Oh! dear, no! he does not—I mean he thinks a great deal of my cousin Irene—in fact he is—" Grel was on the point of saying "engaged" to her; but she stopped in time, and only added in a sort of confidential tone, "he does not like me; really and truly he often judges me from a wrong point of view!"

The mask thought within himself that he had never admired her more than at that moment. Nevertheless he remained silent while he treasured up her very unguarded remarks.

And now if Grel had seen the expressive countenance of the "Commander of the Faithful," she would have been greatly alarmed at the effects of her own words. But after swallowing down his surprise as conveniently as he could to hide it from his companion, he said,

"But you have not told me, did you see the device on his shield?"

"I did not see the shield."

"Ah! you were so taken up with the knight!" Grel would have replied that in truth she was "afraid of him;" but her companion continued, "I will tell you—in the centre was a large 'pearl,'

‘proper,’ as large as a pigeon’s egg; on a field azure. On one side ‘a hand,’ on the other ‘a heart.’ I am not using heraldic terms, but you will understand me. The motto to this singular shield was—

‘A large hand to clutch firmly,
A large heart to love enduringly,
A large pearl of great value.’”

Grel was silent. She did not understand either the device or the motto. Sara Thorn had read it, and comprehended. Lord Danby had seen it, and remembered the day when Mr. Hamilton had proposed to Grel! Irene saw it, and now that Mr. Hamilton was lost to her, placed her hopes on Mr. Maynooth! Miss Barrymore saw it and marvelled. Brenda Cheetham saw it and sneered. Only Grel, “the large pearl,” was in the dark.

“Do you not admire the shield and the motto?” said the Caliph.

“It must be very clever,” said Grel, quite unconscious she herself was “the pearl,” “because everything Mr. Hamilton says or does *is* clever.”

“Surely Mr. Hamilton *ought* to be very much obliged to you for your very excellent opinion of him,” said the Caliph in low tones.

“Oh! no, indeed! He does not value my opinion; though I may confess I did think it odd that so learned and fastidious a gentleman as Mr. Hamilton should condescend to wear my colours.”

“Fastidious!” said the Caliph in a tone of surprise; “and who, pray, says he is fastidious?”

Grel did not remark the change in the tone of his voice from pleasure to annoyance.

“Oh! all of us. Even Irene says that. And then he is so stately and reserved, that some even find fault with him on that score. Brenda Cheetnam, for instance, does not like his pride, and—”

But Grel again stopped, conscious she was becoming a little too confidential in her remarks. “For myself,” resumed she, by way of getting out of the scrape, and shielding Brenda, of whose name she regretted the use, “I am afraid of him! I used to admire him very much; but now certain things have occurred to make me actually afraid of him!”

“You did not appear so when you were leaning on his arm,” said the Caliph, again in a whisper.

“No. I tried my very utmost to behave with circumspection, and not give him cause to rebuke me!” The Caliph’s hair almost stood on end under his fez. “And besides, if he should ever become ‘cousin’ to me, I should like to stand well in his cousinly opinion.”

The Caliph, in his sincere admiration of Grel on this evening, did not remember any occasion in which in his opinion she had deserved rebuke. Grel laughed, and thought she had explained the matter very clearly to her companion; but he was silent from his extreme astonishment.

“Then you mean to tell me Mr. Hamilton is to marry your cousin Irene?” said the Caliph, in low and hurried tones. Perhaps he was half ashamed

to ask the question from behind his mask ; at least, we offer that apology for him, though history has not chronicled the fact.

“Irene *is* engaged to him—has been a long time. Every one knows that, and I wonder *you* do not. Mistress Nuala does, and Yolande, and Miss Barrymore, and——”

“All the county of Z——,” said the Caliph, in tones so stern as to make Grel start ; and marvel that Mr. Maynooth should feel annoyed on that score.

But now the attention of the company was attracted by Will Somers, who, at his post behind the king’s chair, carried on a conversation with his sovereign, which was both amusing and edifying to the listeners.

“Gossip ! We must consider the ladies in all our arrangements.”

“Ay, ay, Will !” said the king.

“Our Jews and Gentiles will turn into ‘parsons’ when they unmask. The Dundrearies and Cardinals will only prove to be very common-place men ; and even our ‘handsome’ cousin, ‘the Caliph Haroun Al-raschid,’ only a ‘plain’ country-gentleman. We must guard the ladies well ; that they shall not be taken aback by these changes !”

“Ay, ay, Will. The ladies must be cared for. A surprise to a woman has sometimes done more harm than good.”

“The gentlemen must have our orders to unmask, Gossip,” said Will, “and the ladies our per-

mission to remain masked until further notice."

"True—true. Will, tell them so," said the king.

"Only gentlemen to *unmask*!" shouted Will. "All the ladies to please to hide their pretty faces from the eyes of their sovereigns, and of the rest of the world, for some time longer, and allow the gentlemen time to turn their coats, and each become somebody else, but little foreseen, in an instant. Heigh—presto—change!"

The gentlemen unmasked, and many of the ladies were at their wits' end with astonishment. None more so than Grel. Her first intention was to arise and run away from the scene. This she could not do. The "Commander of the Faithful" sat steadily gazing at her, mask in hand, from the large and lustrous dark eyes of Mr. Hamilton. She had much difficulty in hiding her vexation; doubly vexed was she that in the first instance she had not enjoyed her ramble with the "Giant," because she so feared some stern admonition from Mr. Hamilton; and now she was deprived of the actual pleasure of Mr. Maynooth's company—with whom she had supposed herself in conversation—by the positive reality of Mr. Hamilton's presence. Was ever anything more untoward! We may say once more, "poor Grel!" She durst not raise her timid eyes and search round the table for Mr. Maynooth, in whose good-nature she could have trusted herself to say anything, without fear of trampling on any of the well-known courtesies

of society. But with the refined, and, as she had told him, "fastidious" Mr. Hamilton the case was different, and Grel felt herself "different" in one moment. She trembled as she sat there, and certainly she durst not again meet the dark, dark eyes, that, under cover of a mocking smile, looked down upon her and seemed to enjoy her confusion!

There was one thing peculiarly belonging to Grel's character, and it came to the rescue now. When her heart ached very much, and she feared the prying and inquiring eyes of her companions,—to shield herself from their penetration, and, as it were, to conceal her own thoughts,—she became playful, with a temerity that surprised herself. Mr. Hamilton, as we have said, bent down to her with a strange smile resting on his handsome features, and Grel rallied under the weight of her troubles.

"I will not *unmask*," said she, opening wide her fan, and shielding herself from his gaze.

"You have already thrown away your mask," said he laughingly.

Grel put up her hand instinctively; she did not remember *unmasking*. Her companion laughed the more, but she thankfully felt that the tiny black velvet mask still hid her features from Mr. Hamilton.

"No, I am still masked," said she playfully.

"You still wear a mask of black velvet. True, but you have made so many confessions, and among others confessed 'your fear' of me. There-

fore the 'mask' of kindness towards myself that you formerly wore you have now most certainly discarded."

"I am sure I have never masked the expression of my features on any occasion, if that is what you mean," said Grel. "And is it not natural that one so little learned as myself, either in books or men or manners, should stand somewhat in awe of your great superiority in these matters?"

Mr. Hamilton bowed, and said with a gracious smile,

"*You* have very cleverly 'masked' your awe, and I should never have suspected it if I had not myself heard you confess 'I am afraid of him.'"

"Oh, yez ! oh, yez ! oh, yez !" shouted Will Somers. "My gossip Hal, and your gracious sovereign King Henry VIII. commands all you Queens, Princesses, Contadine, Medoras, &c., to please to remove those bits of black velvet, and let us gentlemen of the land gaze upon your pretty faces."

The ladies complied, and after a moment or two of silence, each one looking at his or her neighbour, the hum of conversation, mingled with here and there a joyous laugh, filled the air. The gentlemen generally had been more deceived than the ladies, excepting only in the case of the Lady Grel, whose voice so plainly betrayed her. The only two in which the ladies had been mistaken were, as we have shown, Mr. Hamilton and Mr. Maynooth.

"How well Captain Fortescue plays his part," said Grel to her companion, by way of saying something that should take his attention from herself.

"Yes. He told me he had prepared a suitable costume for 'Wamba' the jester in *Ivanhoe*, but when Sir Hildebrand determined upon 'King Hal,' Will Somers, the well-known jester to that king, was the more suitable character of the two."

"What a remarkable group that is in the centre of the table!"

"Yes; as Dundreary said, 'So abominable an anachronism' seldom occurs. Queen Elizabeth, in all her glory, seated by the side of her own father, and Queen Katherine still in favour. *Queen Anna Bullen* would have made the group complete."

"By the commands of my gossip Hal, the gentlemen are desired to take the ladies to the ball-room, and there to tread on everybody's 'light fantastic toe!'" shouted Will Somers.

A general movement took place; ladies searching for fans and clutching opera-cloaks; gentlemen making way for ladies and securing partners for the dance. As Grel rose the press was great, and she dropped her fan; a minute or two elapsed before she recovered it, and she had turned away from her late companion. Presently she heard him whisper,

"You will grant me the pleasure of the first dance?"

He had taken her hand and drawn her arm within his own.

"I think I shall not dance just yet," said she.

"Not dance! Oh! do not say so," said he, bending down.

She started as those tones lingered on her ear, and looking up, saw Mr. Maynooth. "Indeed you surprise me. I thought you were Mr. Hamilton."

"Indeed now *you* surprise me—I am only Otho Raymond Maynooth." "Am I always to be mistaken for Hamilton?" thought he.

But Grel had really been conversing with Mr. Hamilton up to that moment, and thought she was leaning on his arm.

"This change is absolute magic," said she.

"I beg your pardon," said Mr. Hamilton, "but you will honour me with the first dance."

Grel looked first at one, then at the other; the crush was great where the three were standing, and all seemed amused by the appearance of two gentlemen in Turkish costume, the differences in which were so trifling, that on a first view they could not be discovered. But now the fact was plainly to be seen that Mr. Maynooth was taller than Mr. Hamilton. The jewels with which his dress was plentifully ornamented, were also larger, and of different kinds. "His waistband was half a foot wide, all in diamonds." He wore also "a superb chain of diamonds, mounted transparently, each the size of a large Barcelona nut." The aigrette of heron's feathers was fastened by a

button composed of large diamonds, in the centre of which was an "emerald as large as a pear."

"He is only my grand vizier, Giaffir," said Mr. Maynooth to Grel.

"You are the *real* 'Haroun Alraschid,'" said Lord Prellsthorpe, as he passed with Miss Thorn to the ball-room.

"Certainly—I am the real 'Commander of the Faithful;' and, Giaffir, old fellow," continued Mr. Maynooth, as he patted Mr. Hamilton on the back, "the lady has accepted me, and there is her sister coming up—suppose you turn to her for consolation."

Mr. Hamilton bowed, and Mr. Maynooth went off with his prize.

"And now, pray, can you tell which of the two 'grand Turks'?"—he purposely applied the epithet Grel herself had used early in the evening—"you have condescended to accept?"

"If you were both masked, I could not distinguish between you—the more especially as that, when masked, you change the tones of your voices. This adds greatly to the complete disguise of the costume."

"And you would not know me from Hamilton?" said he, in a tone of surprise, and bending down to her; "you seem to me to be always thinking of him."

This remark was in a tone of reproach, but Grel was unconscious of it, and replied, with her accustomed artlessness,

“Of Mr. Hamilton !—I used to think of him a great deal—very often, I mean ; but latterly I have been glad to get away from him. You see, once upon a time I offended him ; and while we were at supper to-night, and thinking I was talking to you, I told him ‘I was afraid of him.’”

Grel laughed, and opened her eyes wide as she looked up and met Mr. Maynooth’s gazing at her.

“But you are not the least afraid of me ?” said he, bending still lower.

Now what could have struck upon the sensitiveness of “Maidenhood” that at that particular moment a certain undefined sort of fear seemed to paralyze her reply. She would have withdrawn her arm, but he prevented this. They had by this time entered the ball-room, and the company generally were promenading previously to joining in the first dance. At this turn in their conversation Mr. Maynooth led her back through the arch from the ball-room, that led into the entrance-hall, and “Maidenhood” rallied. Here was a ready subject for her tongue.

“Tell me,” said she, now trying to speak playfully, “were yon the gentleman who stood rapt in silent emotion with the gorgeous beauties of this hall when Brenda and I entered ?”

“Certainly not. I was then in armour, leaning against the large cedar. Why do you ask ?”

“Oh ! do look at this hall flooded with moonlight.”

“Yes, at two o’clock the moon will be at the

full; it is now one A.M., and she contrives to stream through the richly-stained glass, and deck every object in hues of scarlet, and purple, and gold. The statues are in an amiable mood, and stand quietly on their pedestals."

Grel grasped his arm, and he once more bent his head to her, as he added, in a mysterious whisper, but with a mocking smile,

"Have you not heard they sometimes roam about the Park, and enjoy a little fighting after their own fashion?"

"Hush!—hush!" said Grel, and they were joined by others wandering from the crowded ball-room into the cool hall.

"Come here," said Isaac the Jew (Lord Prellsthorpe)—"stand on this second stair."

The stairs were opposite the entrance-doors. Grel and Mr. Maynooth, with others, followed his advice, and soon three or four stairs were filled with occupants. The lawns, fountains, and flowers were as fully visible as in the daytime. The light, it is true, was paler, the large trees looked darker, the broad shadows from them very dark, only the topmost boughs catching the moon's rays. The multitude of lookers-on round the outer edge of the wire fence were now distinctly seen broken up into little knots of four or six, and wandering hither and thither in the moonlight. Some had made their way to a large tent in the more distant part of the Park, where were to be had "refreshments for all comers." But this tent

was not visible to the party now standing in the hall.

"It was a very wise thought to leave this hall unlighted," said Mr. Maynooth.

"Most judicious!" said Mr. Cheetham. "Some one must have known the wonderful effects of moonlight on statuary and armour, and trophies of all kinds, to have had the courage to forego glare for reality."

"Everything looks in keeping with the moonlighted lawns and splashing fountains. The statues have a noble refinement about them that is not surpassed even in the light of day," said Mr. Maynooth.

"They are alive," said Grel, grasping Mr. Maynooth's arm with some degree of real terror.

"Indeed you are right, Grel, love," said the deep voice of the Earl; "in the daytime these are statues in armour, but by this light we might look upon them as living men."

"I quite expect to see them descend from their pedestals," said Lord Danby, "and dispute with us the honour of dancing with the ladies."

"Nay, D.," said the Earl, "I do not anticipate this, though, I admit, I greatly enjoy the wonderful effect of light and shade; and I also agree with Grel—they have so great a look of life, uneducated minds might feel some natural alarm, and even we who are educated might *not* feel much surprised if the statues should courteously bow to us."

A general laugh followed this speech, and Miss Barrymore, who was present at the time, thank-

fully acknowledged to herself "that the Barons had behaved extremely well," and when she afterwards talked the matter over with Almeric, she admitted "that if the Baron Almeric had dropped his arm on that occasion, and startled her friends by such unseemly behaviour, that she should never again have put faith in her ancestors!" But this did not happen.

"This is more like a scene from Boccaccio, than plain English ladies and gentlemen enjoying themselves in an English gentleman's home!" said Mr. Maynooth, as the party returned to the ball-room. But in and out, as long as the dancing continued, fresh groups occasionally entered the hall, and revelled in the charming scene, admired their own gay dresses, mistily seen in the steel mirrors; and the glittering trophies of past ages on the walls.

On one occasion, when Lord Danby and Grel were there, and Irene and Almeric Barrymore, Lord Danby said,

"These old gentlemen," pointing to the Barons, "look as if they would like to join us, and it must be very stupid to them to stand so still and quiet while we dance so merrily. Suppose we invite them to the ball?"

"*Don't!*" said Almeric Barrymore, in such a tone of command as to astonish his listeners; and the more so, as Baron Anselmo flung his truncheon on the floor at the same moment, and dragged away the lute that hung by the side of "*Feramorz*" (Almeric Barrymore.)

The noise startled some of the dancers who were near that end of the ball-room, and they, to use their own words, "rushed to the rescue." Among these were Mr. Maynooth and Miss Barrymore.

Now, Mr. Maynooth—whose intellect, as we have before said, was eminently practical—explained this incident by assuring the startled visitors "that the truncheon had been caught by the strings of the lute as Almeric passed the statue! And as he had turned hastily to reply to Lord Danby, the truncheon had been pulled from the mailed hands of the Baron—who was evidently off his guard at the time—and fell heavily on the marble floor!"

The company accepted this explanation, and went away satisfied; but Almeric Barrymore could not conceal from himself the startling fact—that only by his own prompt tone of command, in reply to Lord Danby, had he prevailed on the Barons to remain quiet until the company had left Heraldstowe!

CHAPTER XIX.

"SORROW COMES UNSENT FOR."

NOW, in many points this fête at Heraldstowe was a perfect success. The weather—on which so much depends on occasions like this—was charming! No moonbeams were ever more

soft and gleaming; no glowworms more luminous; no fountains could have had more sparkling waters, nor splashed and dashed them more resplendently; no night flowers have filled the air with a more refined perfume; no night singers among the birds have been more mellifluous—from the loud roulades of the nightingale, to the sweet chirrup of the tiny grasshopper lark; no trees have been more magnificently grouped on this knoll and that; no Park have had a brighter green, nor done the moon's beams more honour; no avenues ever more graced by graceful nymphs and lordly cavaliers, no ladies more attractive, no knights more chivalrous, no company more hilarious, no statues could have had more majestic beauty, nor been more "alive" to the parts they had to play; no host more hospitable, no disguises more complete nor more becoming, no supper more bountiful nor more refreshing, and no dance in the whole world more enjoyed!

We chronicle the above facts with great pleasure. But, alas!—we must also truthfully record—many hearts were left ill at ease! It must seem strange, after so many points of the best, that there should be one point to mar them all! But many things that seem strange are, nevertheless, *true*.

Brenda Cheetham left the fête in a terribly passionate mood. Now that she had in some sort compelled Lord Danby to make his engagement with her known to her parents; she expected that he would bestow more notice on her in public; but

in this she was sorely disappointed. In supporting the character of Lord Dundreary he said but little to any one, and took no active part in anything. Much of this Brenda found excuses for in the early part of the evening, though she could not fail of observing he was always attentive to "Lalla Rookh," when by any chance she came near. Still Brenda, with that wilful determination to believe him sincere—against all appearance to the contrary—still she thought he was the "victim" of circumstances, and in some measure even of his assumed character.

But, on the contrary, Lord Danby had enjoyed Brenda's discomfort. Only occasionally could she approach him, and whisper that "he *promised* to be very attentive, and that now he did not keep his word." He made no excuse; amused himself when he pleased with any other lady, and left Brenda to fill up her own "measure of discontent" as she chose. He himself—though not perhaps on this evening—but he himself had long resolved that he would show no mercy to Brenda! Of all the ladies whom it had been his pleasure to "fool" at the top of his bent, Brenda had not only been the most unamiable, but she had contrived often to make him very uncomfortable. When "Maidenhood" places herself in the power of a selfish and cold-hearted man, let her beware of the consequences! Brenda would not be advised by those who knew better than herself, and for the present we leave her in her misery.

Now, Miss Barrymore had exerted herself greatly to get up this fête, both to make it such as should be enjoyable to Almeric, and also sufficiently full of "pageantry" and old-fashioned "state" to gratify Sir Hildebrand. Her anxieties had been great and absorbing, the more especially as that she could not be certain of the "good behaviour" of her extraordinary ancestors. But well as the fête had gone off, successful as the evening had been from beginning to end, and excellent as had been the demeanour of her celebrated ancestors, even Miss Barrymore had on this occasion added another to the many cares that had formerly threatened almost to overwhelm her.

After the gay company had departed, and she had walked through the deserted hall, thanking in her heart her ancestors for their estimable conduct, inasmuch as that they had *not* left their pedestals and mingled in the dance, nor seated themselves in unexpected places at supper or otherwise—after she had assured herself that her dear grandfather was not more fatigued than might reasonably have been expected—after talking over the evening for ten minutes with Almeric, and receiving his hearty thanks for her great exertions, and ardent praise for the splendour and novelty of the scene as a whole—after all this, why did she dismiss her maid as soon as possible?—and when left alone, why did she sit musingly, resting her head upon her hand, instead of seeking the repose that must be so very desirable after such great fatigue?

We will chronicle her thoughts.

"If I had not experienced this sensation of sinking *heartache*, I never could have credited that such a feeling was possible from so slight a cause."

"Maidenhood" is always taken by surprise when she has an attack of *heartache* !

"How could I have fallen into this snare? I do not despise myself for admiring Mr. Hamilton ; I think his commanding talents excite one's admiration—*silent* admiration, that is. I do not choose to be always heard eulogizing this handsome and that learned man, as some do—Irene Stuart and Sara Thorn among the number. But I wish I did not feel so sad, and I cannot understand that to appreciate Mr. Hamilton, as I feel I do—that to appreciate him should make me unhappy ! Very peculiar, and to me unaccountable !"

And yet somehow or other "Maidenhood" generally contrives to unravel such mysteries unassisted.

"I *must* despise myself if I regard Mr. Hamilton with——" the colour came brightly into her cheeks ; her thoughts remained inactive, and she covered her face with her hands. For a few minutes Miss Barrymore was rather overpowered by the convictions of her own conscience ; when she recovered she resumed—

"The talk of the county of Z—— has been that—that Mr. Hamilton admired Lady Irene. I never credited that ; but then he never gave *me* the slightest reason to suppose——" again she

covered her face with her hands and remained silent. "However, there is no doubt on my mind that he prefers Grel to all the world; and though I do feel so unhappy, I say God bless Grel! There must be something in Grel that I have not yet discovered, when she attracts two such men as Raymond Maynooth and Mr. Hamilton. But that I should make this discovery on this particular occasion, and awake to these unpleasant facts just through my own foolish conversation with Mr. Hamilton, does surprise me! I really thought I was talking to Raymond Maynooth! And a sad amount of nonsense it was; and for the time being I—even I—was as simple as Grel Stuart. He, Mr. Hamilton, is so grand and stately himself, I am always on my guard in conversation with him, and his ideas on the subject of the "fair sex" are so stern and strict! I have felt miserably uncomfortable ever since Raymond opened my eyes to the fact that I had mistaken the one for the other. I remembered I had been very 'free and easy' instead of, as I should have been with Mr. Hamilton, dignified and reserved; and this knowledge—that I have probably fallen in his estimation—is the key to my present understanding of my position. I shall do no good by sitting here, while the sun is beginning to displace the moon, and gild all things rosily. I will at least go to bed and try to sleep."

And there we leave Miss Barrymore, who, in spite of all her troubles, fell asleep.

The Lady Irene did not dismiss her maid until after all the duties of disrobing had been attended to in the usual way. When at length she was ready to retire for the night, she got into bed with an impatient grunt, put her head on the pillow, and determined that her annoyance should not keep her awake. Her opinion of the fête, combined with Lord Danby's, deserve to be recorded in full, and they shall have that honour at some future time.

The evening had been a triumph to Sara Thorn. Lord Danby had proposed to her, and Sara had very properly referred him to her father. But Sara's heart had been propitiated before this evening. Lord Danby could, when he chose, dismiss his frivolous manners, and become an agreeable companion. Lord Danby was tolerably well read in the polite literature of the day, and his pretended ignorance on this subject and that was a species of affectation that amused him, as he said, "when he had nothing better to do." It is only necessary to record at this point in our chronicle, that Sara Thorn had enjoyed the evening very greatly—that, unlike the three ladies we have before mentioned, she went to her pillow with a happy heart, and her sleep was filled with roseate dreams of her future career. The engagement between Lord Danby and Miss Thorn will all be explained at the proper time.

Now, Almeric Barrymore had observed that the hideous stain upon the arm of the Baron Almeric

had at length disappeared. Once or twice he had wished to tell one of the servants to cleanse the armour, but he was deterred by the thought that it was only visible in a particular light; and as his grandfather and Zara had never noticed it, perhaps it was unwise to make any fuss, the more especially as that the servants might be even more astonished at the stain than he himself. Almeric kept a written account of all that happened to the barons, therefore the house of Barrymore will have more wonderful legends of the deeds of their worthy ancestors to add to those already so widely known.

CHAPTER XX.

“THAT IS MY TALE; WHAT IS YOURS?”

IN the course of a few days after the fête at Heraldstowe, Mistress Nuala Maynooth called at Prellsthorpe Rectory to take leave. She was going for a few months’ stroll on the Continent.

“How I do envy you!” said Grel, clasping her hands together.

“Envy, my dear Grel! Pray, if you wish to travel abroad, what is there to prevent the indulgence of the whim?”

“Why,” said she, drawing her chair closer to Mistress Nuala, “I do not well see how I could go

abroad. The Cheethams would never dream of such a thing, and——”

“My dear, though Mr. Cheetham is your guardian, he is not a tyrant. He is a sensible, well-read, kind-hearted gentleman, and always glad to promote the happiness of his young ward by any means in his power.”

The old lady had seized Grel's hand as she spoke, and retained it caressingly between her own.

“You are quite right; no one can be more kind than Mr. Cheetham, and I am sure he would consent to any expressed wish of mine—that is, in reason.”

“Would you like to go with me?” said Mistress Nuala, thereby giving Grel's newly-awakened hopes something to support them.

“With you, dear Aunt Nuala?” said Grel, as the colour came brightly into her cheeks, and she kissed the old lady rapturously.

“Now, let me explain to you. I travel alone, attended by Roberts and his wife. I engage a courier in London, go when and where I please, and return when I am tired. Now, if you, attended by your maid, would like to join a tiresome stupid old lady like myself——”

“Hush, hush, you are charming, and I have always loved you so much!”

“Then, my dear, tell me—would you like to go?”

“So very, very much,” said Grel enthusiastically; “but can it be?”

“Very easily, my dear. I will see Mrs. Cheetham myself, and settle the matter at once.”

And so easy was it, that arrangements were very soon made, and in the course of a day or two the ladies were off to the Continent.

As this had been unthought of by Grel until the very hour in which permission had been granted, her departure was not known in the neighbourhood. Grel was *not* a lady of much importance. Up to this time “the neighbourhood” had taken but little notice of her, and her comings in and goings out were events of *no* consideration. Guileless in spirit, unwilling to quarrel—even with Brenda and her cousins—anxious for peace, the Lady Grel had gradually learned, since the arrival of her relatives at the Park, that “the least said the soonest mended.”

Mrs. Cheetham promised to make her excuses to those who might naturally expect to see Grel before her flight, and at length even her relations were left in the same ignorance of her actions as the surrounding neighbourhood, for she left a kind message for her aunt Lady Prellsthorpe with Mrs. Cheetham to the purport, “that her departure was so sudden and unexpected she had not had a single moment to spare, and that she herself had been obliged to superintend the arrangements of her own wardrobe and packages, for that in truth she had but a very inexperienced little maid to assist her.”

And Grel was off, as it afterwards turned out, to the surprise of the county of Z—.

The two ladies with their attendants met at the railway station at Stowe-in-the-Valley, at a given hour on a given morning. There, quite unexpectedly, they were joined by Almeric Barrymore, who now, in fulfilment of his promise to his sister, was following Dr. Quinn's advice, and leaving his home for a considerable time. The two ladies and Almeric entered the same carriage, to travel together as far as London. And at the same time Almeric confessed,

"He was very angry at being compelled to act by Dr. Quinn's advice, and he thought, by way of solace to his ruffled feelings, he had better break entirely new ground and set off for Vancouver."

Before the train started another well-known gentlemen, even Mr. Hamilton, made his appearance. Very much surprised was he to discover the trio so cosily seated together! Unfortunately that carriage was full, and Mr. Hamilton was compelled to enter another. As he only went as far as Landeswold with a return ticket, when he left the train at that place he had no opportunity of saying a word. A nod of the head to Almeric, a bow to the ladies, and Mr. Hamilton had left the platform.

Mr. Hamilton, as he journeyed to Landeswold, could not but turn over in his mind the singular group he had just seen. Almeric Barrymore the guardian of Mrs. Nuala Maynooth and the Lady Grel Stuart! Could anything be more ill-judged? Mr. Hamilton could not unravel the mystery to his own satisfaction. Poor Grel fell lower still in his

estimation. Either he had a peculiar talent for making the most of appearances, or Grel was particularly unfortunate in influencing his judgment.

“She seems to me to flirt with everybody that comes in her way. I have seen her—so improperly seated under the trees—with Maynooth. And now she is laughing and talking with Almeric Barrymore! And only that foolish little old woman, who, if she is not, will make herself blind and deaf, I suppose, to play propriety. What can Mrs. Cheetham be about? Poor thing,” he was thinking of Grel then, “she must have been very ill brought up. But what are her relations about, to let her go wandering over the world for months together with Almeric Barrymore.”

Mr. Hamilton’s summing up was not favourable to Grel, and he himself became stern in temper, and cold in manner, as he allowed his thoughts to dwell upon the three so cosily and happily seated together.

It so happened that instead of calling immediately on Lady Prellsthorpe to announce the fact of her niece’s departure for the Continent, as Mrs. Cheetham had intended, she was delayed by various circumstances for several days; and during this time, by some means or other, strange reports became rife in the neighbourhood.

When Mr. Hamilton called at the Park, and mentioned the fact of having seen Grel on his journey to Landeswold, he was met by perfect

silence on the part of Irene and Lord Danby. Thinking that probably they had not understood him, he spoke a second time. Irene arose and left the room, and Lord Danby turned his back on his visitor, and walked to the window. A few seconds of thought convinced Mr. Hamilton there was something wrong, and as he had argued himself into an unfavourable opinion of Grel, he was quite prepared to hear and credit the worst that could be said against her. Mr. Hamilton sighed as he rapidly ran over in his own mind the pros and cons for or against Grel, as he then acknowledged to himself he had been charmed by her youthful innocence, intelligent countenance, and expressive beauty, even on a first introduction, and that only by her frequent departure from the very essence of good breeding did he at last relinquish the intention to propose, and resign entirely his originally very favourable opinion. "Cæsar's wife must not be *suspected*," even of the smallest lapse in refinement of manner, or propriety of conduct. Mr. Hamilton pushed Grel from the pedestal whereon he had so stealthily enshrined her, in spite of his misgivings and harsh judgments, and sighed again over the ruin as she fell. But Mr. Hamilton determined he would know the worst, if it were possible to get that worst out of Lord Danby.

Lord Danby was very plausible, declared he did not wish to injure Grel in Mr. Hamilton's opinion. If he had not heard the reports that were

banded from one to another, perhaps he would hear them soon enough. For his part, he should not himself believe that *she and Barrymore had run off together*, until they returned, and told him so themselves. Perhaps the county of Z—— was less sceptical, and less tender of Grel's happiness than himself; he could not help that. It was a sore trial to his dear sister Ren, who, as a matter of course, could not bear to hear the subject mentioned in her presence; and, therefore, he must ask him, Mr. Hamilton, to avoid disturbing her equanimity on any future occasion.

Lord Danby said a great deal more that need not be repeated; and though we admit he had said enough, or hinted enough, to damage Grel in the opinion of the county of Z——, we regret it falls to our lot truthfully to chronicle that Mr. Hamilton did not see through Lord Danby's falsification of facts, but believed the implied slander. So learned, so reflective, so wise, and so easily deceived!

When Irene returned, traces of tears were still to be seen. The conversation fell on other subjects. Irene's manner was very subdued and sad—Mr. Hamilton's tender and considerate. How could he be otherwise than considerate and sympathetic in so sad a case? When he took his leave, he not only left a very favourable impression of himself, but even he too was favourably impressed by Irene. He had not thought her capable of so much heart; he discovered he

had misjudged her. Even he, hard, cold, reserved, and stern, as many thought him—even he felt uncomfortable with that “empty pedestal” on his hands. And besides, he thought,

“I really must marry some time or other.”

He would observe the Lady Irene with more patience than he had hitherto done. And thus Mr. Hamilton consoled himself for the time being with the displacement of Grel.

Meanwhile, let us return to Lord Danby and Lady Irene,

“There, Ren, you have made ‘a hit,’” said Lord Danby as soon as Mr. Hamilton rode away. “I was on the point of asking you which you had at length made up your mind to have, Hamilton or Maynooth, but this morning has decided Hamilton in your favour.”

“You have quite deserted me, D.,” said the lady, pettishly. “Do you think Grel will suffer from this report, which it has amused you to raise? No—not in the least. You said, when we had reason to suppose that Mr. Hamilton had proposed—you said that you would torment Grel until she would be glad to leave the neighbourhood, and go to Aunt Juliana, and you have done no such thing, and I shall be——”

“Very likely to remain Ren Stuart, instead of either becoming Ren Hamilton, or Ren Maynooth. Very true,” said he, yawning, and throwing himself at full length on a sofa, and placing his hands at the back of his head;

“but you forget, Ren, how much I do for your sake. The only time I condescended to speak to Brenda at that Heraldstowe *fête* was to wile from her the truth of Grel’s engagement or not with Hamilton. That news alone ought to have comforted you—Hamilton had *not* offered to Grel. And again you forget, Ren, when I amused myself with Grel, on first coming into the county, she was as fresh and as simple as a milkmaid ; she credited every word I uttered, and fussed herself night and day to escape from an invisible net, which net, in point of fact, had no existence. I did not want to marry the little dolt—it is true I wished to make her think I *did*. I succeeded, and was gratified—she wretched. But now the case is different. You cannot bamboozle Grel now, as you might have done two months ago. She has lived *years* in these few weeks, and simple, innocent, truthful as she is at this moment, Grel will live to astonish the county of Z——. She is a true Stuart, and inherits much of my uncle’s peculiar intellect.”

Lord Danby stopped, and yawned, and Irene replied—

“Upon my word, a fine long speech in Grel’s favour. I wish I had never seen her, or——”

“That is folly, Ren. Wish Hamilton had never seen her, though, all things considered, you have still a good chance with him. Wish Maynooth had never seen her. But, Ren, take my advice—do not wish on the subject. This country

life is killing me ; it will kill you in the end if you get plumped down a country dame."

Irene did not reply, and after a prolonged yawn, Lord Danby continued :

"Why do not you affect the simple and insipid, like Grel? Do you not see how wonderfully it takes with clever men?"

"I have no patience with the silly little dolt," replied she angrily.

"I know that ; why waste words upon me ? And again, Irene, why do you not court the Maynooth women ? You would not become intimate with Yolande because of her stylish-looking figure, and Spanish-looking face, and you pooh-poohed the old lady into utter silence ! This was unwise, Ren."

"Indeed you are wrong, or you are sleepy, or you wish to torment me. Yolande is not so handsome as that I need fear comparison with her ; but she has other qualities I do not like."

"Ah ! gratify my curiosity."

"She is as learned as her aunt or her brother ! and really one requires a——"

"You require a Dragoman : I understand. She talks Latin, I'll bet a tester to a——"

"You may laugh, D. ; but I could not show her a flower of any kind, that she did not call it by some strange and, to me, unpronounceable name. And—and one day when I foolishly took her into my dressing-room, she—she——"

"She found out you do not discuss the same

kind of literature as her worthy self, and her learned brother. That is of no importance, for these things are quite matters of taste. So do not fret on that score, Ren—fretting destroys a woman's beauty, and you must not throw yours away so foolishly."

"Fret!—what nonsense you talk! However, I shall not become a blue-stocking to please any one."

"No, Ren, do not. I am sure I will not," said he, yawning.

"You—what have *you* to do with it?"

"I to do with it! Why, if I would coax Yolande to have me, I suppose I must first have a certain amount of learning!"

"Oh! heavens, D., do not have that detestable Yolande—and besides, do tell me, what do you mean to do with that vixenish Brenda Cheet-ham?"

"Do with her! Why, Ren, you make me laugh—what should I do with her but amuse myself!"

"She has compelled you—in some sort—to acknowledge your engagement, and in my opinion her father will not take such things quietly, D."

"He may please himself in his quietude or otherwise! I shall as certainly please myself. He looked very well as Cardinal Wolsey, did he not?"

"What a night that was, D.!—independent of the vexatious aspiringness of Grel and Miss Barrymore, the evening stands alone in its unique

stupidity! I have never had the courage to talk it over."

"That does not surprise me, Ren. For a more deliberately absurd affair never was planned, or acted up to by mortals until that night!"

"There was not a soul present, D."

"Exactly so. That made it extraordinarily unique in its way. There were—excepting our worthy selves—only some forty or fifty—Barrymore said seventy—of the hum-drums of the surrounding twenty miles!"

"Certainly no more! My surprise absolutely absorbs my breath when I think of it! I expected to meet all the county of Z——."

"So also did all reasonable people. But unfortunately even the '*small* expectations' of reasonable people fall short of both rhyme and reason."

"And then, D., Mr. Hamilton was to the full as stately as when he is *unmasked*."

"Ren, take my word for it, you *unmasked* Hamilton this morning. I saw his eyes linger tenderly on your silent sorrow. Never mind that he once fancied Grel; play your cards well, and go in and win! Hamilton is worth a little trouble—at least the *Abbey* is!"

"I thought him colder than usual on his entrance this morning, D.! But tell me, do you think Mr. Maynooth is really taken by Grel? He was—on more than one occasion at Heraldstowe—most particularly attentive to me. I began at

last to fancy that he really must mean something."

"No doubt he did. And yet he does not call here like one *épris* with your beautiful ladyship!"

"You are Job's comforter, and I am compelled to add he was odiously attentive to Grel!"

"And so was Mr. Hamilton; I was present at the scrimmage between the two; Maynooth bore off the prize; and I can tell you Hamilton was *not* pleased *then*; but he is all right *now*, if you will but use the power you have so suddenly and unexpectedly gained."

"Oh! nonsense, D. Use my power, indeed! I am sick of it all. And if mamma does not soon get well enough to allow of our going away from Prellsthorpe, I shall do something desperate."

"So shall I. Indeed so I should have done long ago, only it is a confounded bore moving about the world and making oneself so desperately uncomfortable. But, Ren, do not give up all hope; there is the Mediæval, *he* was extremely attentive to you. Now, what say you to him?"

"He is worse, most decidedly, than the Abbot or the Spider. Would you believe it, D., not content with allowing us to be surrounded by that vulgar crowd outside the wire fence, but he must needs converse with them! explain to them!"

"The Mediæval, Ren! Ah! He is seeking to propitiate the people!"

"Some amongst the crowd of farmers and their wives and daughters were heard by the Mediæval

to marvel how the water could always be flowing from the fountains in showers, and yet never overfill the basins."

"Clever clodhoppers! Well, go on, Ren."

"The Mediæval stopped with me on his arm, D. Do you hear, he stopped with *me*, and explained the principle of hydraulics, or——"

"Homœopathics, probably," said Lord Danby, laughing.

"There, that will do, D., if you laugh at my troubles, I do not accuse you wrongfully. You have deserted me."

And with an angry glance Irene left the room.

CHAPTER XXI.

"HE WHO THINKS HE KNOWS THE MOST KNOWS THE
LEAST."

ONLY a day or two after Mr. Hamilton's visit to Prellsthorpe Park, he called at Heraldstowe. Sir Hildebrand was not at home, and Mr. Hamilton turned away and walked his horse across the park at Heraldstowe, with an intention of calling on Mr. Thorn at Stowe Vicarage. He overtook Miss Barrymore bound to the same place, and he alighted and walked by her side.

Mr. Hamilton had heard no more of Grel and her flight with Almeric Barrymore than he had

gathered from Lord Danby's words. But he had intended to have advised Sir Hildebrand, if opportunity had offered, for the sake of both the young people, to make as little stir in the county as he could help. Unfortunately he had missed Sir Hildebrand, and now stumbled on Miss Barrymore, of course nursing her regret in a lonely walk, and probably suffering from the imprudence of her brother, and the unfeminine conduct of Lady Grel.

At first their conversation was of no moment. Miss Barrymore was rather annoyed than not, that Mr. Hamilton should so unexpectedly become her companion; for though she had a strong regard for him, and a wise appreciation of his talents, she knew that he was attracted by Grel Stuart, or she thought herself sure of this information, and she did not wish, under the circumstances, to see more of him than was absolutely necessary.

Miss Barrymore was not one who would succumb to a preference for the want of a struggle to set herself free. Judiciously she had blamed herself for having this preference for Mr. Hamilton, and yet truthfully she could say, she was *unaware* of it until she felt her *heartache*.

Mr. Hamilton—quite in the dark as to Miss Barrymore's real trouble, which had nothing to do with Almeric and Grel—fancied Miss Barrymore was unusually nervous. And so she was. With the courage of a woman and the skill of an educated lady, she was drawing largely upon her own individuality to help her in this crisis. To

help her to converse with Mr. Hamilton as she had formerly been accustomed, and without betraying her secret thoughts to him.

Mr. Hamilton easily detected the struggle to *appear* more at her ease than she actually was, and as readily determined that she was unhappy on account of Almeric and Grel. Mr. Hamilton, in spite of his reserved and lofty manners, was kind-hearted. He sympathised very deeply with her, and wished he could express this sympathy, but the subject was a delicate one to touch upon with a young lady of only nineteen years of age.

"I am extremely sorry I missed Sir Hildebrand to-day. In a multitude of counsel there is wisdom, saith the proverb, and I should have been glad to help him at this time, if I could."

Miss Barrymore was puzzled. Nevertheless she replied courteously,

"Grandpapa will be sorry that he was absent."

They walked on in silence for a few paces, and then she resumed—

"We miss dear Almeric so much. I try to make up for his loss to dear grandpapa, and comfort him as best I can, but you can understand it is not easy to supply his place."

So, then, Miss Barrymore herself had ventured to speak on a subject that Mr. Hamilton, in his refinement, would have avoided. But *she* had broken the ice. He, then, need not fear to give pain.

"Do you suppose they will remain long absent?" said he.

Miss Barrymore heard the plural pronoun "they," but was quite at a loss how to apply it. Thought is rapid, and she supposed it was a slip of the tongue.

"I do not know how long. I shall see Dr. Quinn soon, and learn if there is any real necessity for a very prolonged tour."

"Your friend Mistress Nuala travels with them, I think?"

Miss Barrymore looked up with a start of surprise, and Mr. Hamilton added,

"I saw them in the train at Stowe-in-the-Valley—Mistress Nuala Maynooth, Lady Grel Stuart, and Mr. Barrymore."

"Yes," said Miss Barrymore quietly, thinking that now she quite understood Mr. Hamilton—"yes, they travelled together."

"Were *you* very intimate with the Lady Grel before this?" said he.

Again Miss Barrymore was puzzled, but she replied as well as she could,

"I do not know very much of Lady Grel, but I think she greatly improves on acquaintance. She is very handsome—handsomer even than her cousin Irene, I think, and so simple—and—and——"

She was trying to speak favourably of Grel, because she thought Mr. Hamilton admired her so much. Nevertheless she hesitated, and Mr. Hamilton, pitying her distress, came to the rescue.

"And yet all rightly judging people will think

she ought to have known better than to go off in this way. I wished much to see Sir Hildebrand, because I think the actual facts are but little known at present ; and for the sake of the future of these two young people—of course I am supposing they will marry—the county should be kept as much in the dark as possible.”

Miss Barrymore stopped in her hasty walk and turned her eyes upon Mr. Hamilton with a wide stare of surprise ; she did not reply, and he—relying upon the truthfulness of the information he had had—made another effort to comfort her.

“ You look surprised at my opinion. But a taint of scandal never leaves a name, or a house ; and I say again—for the sake of the future career of these misguided young——”

“ Mr. Hamilton !” said Miss Barrymore, now in a tone of alarm. “ Scandal !—what evil news have you for me ?”

“ I beg your pardon—pray lean upon me ?”

Mr. Hamilton offered his arm, which Miss Barrymore refused with an impatient gesture. This startled Mr. Hamilton’s horse, and it took a little time to bring the animal into order. By the time Mr. Hamilton had succeeded in re-arranging the bridle over his arm, and keeping his horse in check, Miss Barrymore had made up her mind what to do.

“ Now, if you please, sir,” said she, speaking unconsciously in a tone of command. “ What are your evil tidings ?”

Miss Barrymore stood motionless as a statue. She had become intensely pale, and the sudden change in her complexion, and the query that gave no loophole for escape, compelled Mr. Hamilton to reply at once—

“Almeric Barrymore and Lady Grel are gone off together. I thought you knew, and——”

“Stay!” And now she raised her finger in a premonitory manner. “Repeat that accusation, if you please, Mr. Hamilton.”

“Indeed I am sorry to pain you so. I perceive the news has not reached you. I myself saw——”

“Stop!”

Miss Barrymore had surely never spoken in so loud a tone in her life. The sound of her own voice seemed even to startle herself, certainly it awoke the echoes of that part of the Park, and “stop!” “stop!” “stop!” was repeated by an echo many times, until it died away in the distance, and Miss Barrymore recovered her presence of mind. This was no subject to be slurred over, and have a few hints upon; she determined, as she stood there, that she would not leave her companion until she knew as much as he knew on that subject.

“I do believe you are sorry to pain me; but there are some kinds of torture must be endured before they can be cured. I will bravely endure all the agony you have it in your power to inflict, for the sake of—*the absolute truth*. Mr. Hamilton, as you would treat your own sister, in a mo-

ment of peril, so treat me. I conjure you, *tell me the worst.*"

"I have been told—" and then Mr. Hamilton hesitated; for he recalled Lord Danby's words, viz.—"I shall not myself believe that Almeric and Grel are gone off together until they return and tell me so themselves," and for the first time a *doubt* of the truthfulness of this hint possessed Mr. Hamilton's mind. "It was hinted to me a few days ago, and I had reason to think this hint corroborated from my own personal knowledge and observation—" he was thinking at this moment how often he had seen Grel in exceptional situations; as well as having seen her seated so cosily in the train with Almeric—"It was hinted to me that the Lady Grel Stuart had gone off with your brother, Almeric Barrymore."

"Gone with Almeric! Am I awake? And you—*you*, Mr. Hamilton, credit this!" Miss Barrymore looked very queenly and very handsome, in her strong indignant anger, and Mr. Hamilton silently acknowledged this new feature. He began again to apologize for having so disturbed her; but she interrupted him with a queenly wave of her hand, as her figure seemed to dilate, and become larger during the continuance of her anger. "A truce to all apology; give me *facts*, if you please. You say these 'hints' were 'corroborated' from your own personal knowledge. Now, '*facts*,' if you please."

"Facts, facts, facts," repeated the echo, for Miss

Barrymore had again unconsciously raised her voice when she pronounced that word; but to make amends for this rudeness of tone, her voice fell into a murmur as she uttered the latter words—"if you please."

But this was exactly what Mr. Hamilton could *not* do. He, a magistrate of high standing in the county, accustomed to sift evidence, and see clearly through—stone walls—was he then unable to support his own "charge" by a statement of facts! It was so. He could not say, "I saw the Lady Grel with Mr. Maynooth in Prellsthope Park. I saw her with him again in the hall at Heraldstowe—I saw her also on other occasions—when—though *I* did not question her—her own countenance betrayed her actual guilt!" Mr. Hamilton felt, now, the "lightness" of the evidence against Grel; and as he stood conscious that he could not bring forward a "corroborative" fact, like many others in a like position, Mr. Hamilton looked foolish.

Miss Barrymore's eye never flinched in its steady fixedness on Mr. Hamilton, nor did she move a muscle, nor attempt either to continue her walk to Stowe Vicarage, or to return to Heraldstowe; and Mr. Hamilton, feeling himself very uncomfortably situated, at length stammered out—

"I can only regret that I have—very unintentionally—pained you. I cannot state the—the—" Again he hesitated, and after a little time he resumed, "The only 'fact' that has come under my

personal knowledge—the only fact is, that I saw Almeric and the Lady Grel seated in the same carriage.”

“In the same carriage!” said Miss Barrymore, in a very gentle tone.

“Yes, there is one other—I saw the distress of her relatives, and I learned that she—Lady Grel—had gone away *entirely unknown to them*. I naturally put these ‘facts, together, and——”

“Naturally,” murmured Miss Barrymore.

“And as I thought them ‘corroborative’ of my previous opinion, I—but I am sorry I have so disturbed you.”

When at length Mr. Hamilton had finished this somewhat lame statement of “facts,” to his surprise and consternation, Miss Barrymore, with a sweeping curtsey, uttered the word “corroborative,” and wished him a very good morning.

She turned as she spoke to retrace her steps to Heraldstowe. For the moment Mr. Hamilton was so taken aback, he did not comprehend he was left alone, standing by the side of his horse with the bridle over his arm. He stood following Miss Barrymore’s hastily retreating figure with his eyes, while his senses were in a state of chaos, that for the time being prevented him from comprehending his position. At length, awaking to the reality of the park, and the lake, and the trees, and the birds, and himself and his horse, and Miss Barrymore in the distance, he attempted to follow her. She was by this time so far on her way home that

he was compelled to mount his horse if he would overtake her. He galloped across the park and met her at a bend in the path, and without dismounting, but courteously removing his hat, he said,

“Miss Barrymore, pray allow me to apologise for so very unintention——”

But even the arbitrary and dignified Mr. Hamilton was interrupted by Miss Barrymore, who, stopping in her rapid walk, said, in tones imposing as Mr. Hamilton’s own,

“Once more, Mr. Hamilton, I wish you a very good morning.”

Mr. Hamilton bowed low, turned his horse’s head, and walked slowly across the park; and Miss Barrymore, without further interruption, reached Heraldstowe.

Now Mr. Hamilton, in the whole course of his life, had never before been treated in this manner. He stood high in the county of Z——, as we have made known already, as a gentleman of very *distingué* manner, and as a man of a very nice sense of honour, consequently he was very generally looked up to by younger men, and appreciated by those of his own standing. With ladies he had always been a great favourite. He was not one who would attempt to ensnare a woman’s affections for the gratification of his own vanity, and yet he could not but be aware that women, generally speaking, were attracted by his handsome person, and lofty and rather cold manner. Then, again,

Mr. Hamilton, as we have before said, had such high ideas of the purity and peerlessness of women, that up to this time he had been almost too "fastidious" to select any lady for the dignity of his future wife.

When he first began to make yearly visits to the Abbey—that is some few years before the date of this truthful chronicle—he had been more intimate with a family then inhabiting Mitreberis, which was rented from Mr. Maynooth, during his long absence from England. At that time there was a report that Mr. Hamilton was betrothed to the only daughter of that house. This, however, had no foundation in fact. Mr. Hamilton had never made proposals to any lady, and never, so far as he himself knew, given any lady cause to think he had had a preference for her. If, then, during these bygone years, this lady had flattered herself she had secured Mr. Hamilton, if she nursed her own feelings into a warm return for his supposed adoration, that was her fault. And if such a thing did occur, no doubt she paid the full penalty of her rashness, as all young ladies, who act in so foolish a manner, sooner or later must.

But now, as Mr. Hamilton rode through the park at Heraldstowe, he acknowledged to himself he never had seen so handsome a woman as Miss Barrymore. Her displeasure, which was so dignified, and so held in check, most mightily became her.

"No born queen that ever ruled upon earth

could have looked *more* the 'queen' than Miss Barrymore this morning. So indignant with my charge against the absent—for, I am ashamed to confess to myself, I made an accusation that I had not the power to support, and that Miss Barrymore's manner would lead me to think *false*. I accused Almeric and Lady Grel of—of—what is called 'running away.' Danby gave me my cue, and my own previous judgment of Lady Grel made me jump too hastily to a conclusion. Very possibly Danby hoaxed me, and Lady Irene deceived me. Neither of these suppositions are any excuse to *me* for speaking to Miss Barrymore as I have done. But indeed I admire her—I admire her extremely."

And in this newly-awakened pleasure, his appreciation of Miss Barrymore, Mr. Hamilton put his horse on.

"I have never seen, for one so young—I have never seen a finer woman. And assuredly I never saw one so generously indignant for the absent—as a rule women are too often jealous and envious of each other; and, again, I never knew one dare to treat me with such haughtiness. But I am charmed, attracted, downright gratified. I would not have missed this 'fracas' for the world, though I have been so thoroughly well snubbed."

And Mr. Hamilton laughed as he remembered his own forlorn position, unable to support the "accusation" by "facts," and heartily "snubbed" for his pains.

CHAPTER XXII.

“ONE BEATS THE BUSH AND ANOTHER CATCHETH THE BIRD.”

MR. HAMILTON rode away lost in admiration of Miss Barrymore's queenly beauty and indignant disbelief of any evil connected with Almeric and Grel—at least anything of the nature mentioned by him to her. But Miss Barrymore, in her rapid walk home, lost her *heartache* and nursed her resentment. As soon as she reached Heraldstowe, without disrobing, she seated herself and wrote the following note:—

“MY DEAR MRS. CHEETHAM,

“You will kindly grant me much indulgence, for I have an inquiry to make of so delicate a nature, it ought to be made personally. This I cannot do; and I feel sure you will therefore listen to me with patience, and reply sincerely. How did the Lady Grel Stuart leave her home and your protection?—do you know where she is now? I will call, perhaps to-morrow, and explain. Meanwhile oblige me by sending a positive reply by the bearer to yours, &c.”

A man on horseback was sent with this missive to Prellsthorpe Rectory. He had orders to wait for an answer.

It was between seven and eight P.M. before the messenger returned with the following reply :—

“MY DEAR MISS BARRYMORE,

“I lose not a moment in giving you the following information. On Thursday the 9th ult. Lady Grel, Brenda, and I drove to the station at Stowe-in-the-Valley, where we met by appointment Mistress Nuala Maynooth. To her I confided our amiable ward. Mr. Barrymore came up shortly afterwards, and he entered the same railway carriage in which they were already seated—a very cozy and comfortable party they appeared to me, dear Grel in joyous spirits, as she might well be with the prospect of so much pleasure. She has not been abroad, and Mistress Nuala kindly offered to take her. We heard from her this very morning. Grel and Mistress Nuala are in Paris. They left Mr. Barrymore in London some days ago. Come and lunch with us, my dear Miss Barrymore, to-morrow, or any day convenient to yourself, so it be early. Ever yours, &c.”

“There, Mr. Hamilton,” said Miss Barrymore, as she finished sealing a letter with a large seal of the “Barrymore arms,” scarcely ever used by herself, but which she selected on this occasion to stamp her grand-looking missive with a becoming dignity. “There, sir, I hope that will content even your ‘fastidiousness,’ and convince you that

women like Grel Stuart are *not* so very easily led astray, and that a 'Barrymore' would be the *last* to tempt a woman to her own undoing. Almeric, of all people! Mr. Hamilton, I have done with you!"

Miss Barrymore had enclosed Mrs. Cheetham's letter in an envelope, and written, "When Mr. Hamilton has perused the enclosed, he will have the kindness to return it by the bearer to 'Miss Barrymore, Heraldstowe.'"

A fresh horse was ordered and a second groom dispatched to Prellsthorpe Abbey with orders to wait for an answer.

"Well done!" said Mr. Hamilton, who was positively interrupted in the enjoyment of his wine after dinner by the arrival of this important-looking paper—"well done! Now here is a courageous and warm-hearted woman, doing hearty battle for her absent friend! Danby and his sister must have hoaxed me—I ought to have known better." Mr. Hamilton forgot how much his own opinion of Grel, grounded on several different occasions *unfavourably* to her, had assisted him in his ready belief. Mr. Hamilton returned the letter with "his compliments and thanks," and Miss Barrymore locked both up in her desk—Mrs. Cheetham's letter, that so entirely exonerated Grel, and Mr. Hamilton's tiny reply.

"Yes, you may send your 'compliments and thanks,' but you have done me a deal of good, Mr. Hamilton! You are no better than the rest of

your neighbours. You have cured my *heartache* with one dose. Least of all should I have suspected *you*, Mr. Hamilton, of making an 'accusation,' and of such a nature too, against the absent and innocent, and one also that you could not support by one single fact. I live and learn—live and learn; and *my* 'compliments and thanks' to *you*, Mr. Hamilton!"

And so here is another "empty pedestal," and much as Mr. Hamilton has been *épris*, as we have seen, by Miss Barrymore, his unjustifiable conduct has so lowered him in her opinion, as to take away all chance of success if he should fancy he has at length found a lady fitted for the future honour of becoming his wife, and mistress of Prellsthorpe Abbey.

At Mitreberis Mr. and Miss Maynooth received news for which they were not prepared.

"Raymond, Aunt Nuala is not travelling alone! Did you know this?" said Yolande.

"No. I knew she meant to start for a tour of some weeks or months, as the case might be, and I bade her God speed when I saw her last. And is she not alone?"

"No. Do guess, Raymond, who is with her?"

"Sir Hildebrand Barry-Barrymore," said Raymond with mock solemnity of manner, "or if he is not perhaps he ought to be. Well, why do you laugh, Yolande? Has the old gentleman married the dear old aunt, after all these interminable years? If he have, I heartily wish them *both* joy!"

"How can you be so absurd, Raymond? Lady Grel is gone with Aunt Nuala."

"Grel!—heavens and earth, Yolande! Fancy one's betrothed running away without notice! It disturbs me."

"I did not know you were betrothed, Raymond. When did this happen?"

"You have a very bad memory, Yolande; it seems to me to become worse instead of better. I remember telling you, on our return from the poultry show at Landeswold, that I had determined to give up the Lady Irene, and have her lovely sister Grel. I made up my mind when I found out how well she could smoke, and I left her sister Irene for Hamilton, though I do not think he cares much for her."

"I remember all this, Raymond, in spite of my bad memory. But now tell me, when did Grel promise to have you, or, as you have it, 'betroth' herself to you?"

"A woman like Grel is not required to promise and vow, like other women. I need no promise; her steadfast constancy suffices."

"You mean *your* constancy to her, Raymond?"

"You always seem to me to lose your wits on this subject, Yolande. Would you have me other than constant? I should despise myself if I ever forgot her for the entire space of one minute."

Miss Maynooth laughed as she said,

"But why, then, do you not tell her of your stability?"

"I shall at the fitting moment ; at present she does not doubt me. If I saw the smallest symptom that she thought I had transferred my affections from her to her sister, or to any other less beautiful woman, I should speak at once. I do not. *She* relies on my faith, as *I* rely on hers. We are mutually trustful of each other."

"I assure you, Raymond, you are wrong from beginning to end."

After a pause of some duration, Mr. Maynooth said :

"You told me that once before, and I remember then settling it in my own mind that you saw the whole concern from a wrong point of sight—women do frequently."

"Do you not think that Grel may also see the whole concern from a wrong point of sight?"

"If she did, I should explain to her satisfaction ; at present this is not necessary."

"You are right now, Raymond. I do not think she knows anything about the matter, or sees 'the concern' from any point of view."

"She sees it from my point of sight, as a true wife always does."

"Wife, Raymond!—you certainly are not married."

"You do not understand this subject, Yolande. Be wise—give it up. I wish Grel had told me," added he, musingly—"I should have gone with them ; but she was too modest, the darling. And she is right, as she always is. So unlike you,

Yolande, who are always wrong; but, as I said, 'she is right.' If I had gone abroad with her now, we should have been taking our wedding tour first, and only have to marry afterwards—unless, indeed, we took a second tour after the ceremony, and that would be a great pity, because she likes Wolfscrag as much as I. I mean to live at Wolfscrag after my marriage, Yolande; and we could amuse ourselves quite as satisfactorily to each other there as by 'touring' it again."

More conversation on this same subject followed, in which Miss Maynooth pointed out to her brother that Mr. Hamilton had been extremely attentive to Grel at the Heraldstowe *fête*, and that even now the neighbourhood had not awakened to the fact that *he*, Mr. Maynooth, was the knight in armour on that occasion. She reminded him that he had been mistaken for Mr. Hamilton during the entire evening, and contended that nothing had helped to mystify the company more than that he also appeared in a Turkish costume, the very counterpart of Mr. Hamilton's, immediately on the gentlemen unmasking. Only one or two, like herself and Miss Barrymore, could positively decide which of the two, Mr. Hamilton or Mr. Maynooth, had personated the knight, though, as a rule, Mr. Hamilton had the credit. After much trouble, Miss Maynooth at length succeeded in convincing him that Mr. Hamilton was as likely to propose to Grel on her return as he himself. And then Mr. Maynooth thought "it was one

thing to leave so formidable a rival on the look-out for a wife, and another to put him on the shelf." In pursuance of this thought, he told his sister to have an excellent luncheon ready by two P.M. on the following Thursday, for that it was his intention to ask the Hamiltons. To this announcement Miss Maynooth said,

"The ladies do not visit."

"They may stay at home, if they like," replied he.

"Then I am to expect Mr. Hamilton?"

"Provide luncheon for six or eight—I cannot tell who may come."

And the brother and sister separated.

Now on the morning after Miss Barrymore's active and courageous defence of the absent Grel, she was alone in the morning-room at some customary employment, when the door was suddenly thrown open, and Mr. Hamilton announced. She was taken by surprise, but with that complete command over emotion that all well-bred ladies have, even in early youth, she arose, and received him as if his advent at that early hour were usual.

"My visit is to you," said he, as he bowed over the hand he held; "I took the liberty of asking for you. I know that Sir Hildebrand is not prepared for so early a visitor, and I hoped you would graciously receive me."

He had not given Miss Barrymore the chance of

denying herself ; he followed on the immediate announcement of his name, and she received him with her habitual courtesy. Mr. Hamilton seated himself, and after a pause of only a second or two, said,

“I am here to offer you my hearty thanks for the very kind manner in which you befriended the absent when we met in the park yesterday, and to apologise for——”

“No apology is necessary,” said she with a smile ; “I quite acquit you of any wrong intention, but as the subject is painful to me, you will perhaps allow me to acknowledge myself perfectly satisfied with your wish to explain, and there let the subject drop for ever.”

Mr. Hamilton murmured a few words that she did not hear, and the absent Grel and Almeric were not again discussed.

Mr. Hamilton made rather a long visit. He had expected to find Miss Barrymore as proud and cold as she had been in their interview in the park. He was mistaken. Miss Barrymore had now no motive for displeasure towards him ; she contented herself with having proved the innocence of Grel and Almeric, and resumed her uniformly courteous demeanour.

She lost her chafed and excited manner, and became urbane and gracious, it is true, but with very different feelings towards Mr. Hamilton. His hasty accusation of Grel and her brother had not only roused her indignant wrath on the instant,

but lowered Mr. Hamilton in her estimation. He had not—though she had convinced him of their innocence, recovered his former place in her esteem.

Before this accidental scene in the park, she had looked upon him as a gentleman somewhat above the ordinary slips and errors belonging to all human nature; unconsciously to herself he had occupied a “shrine” in her thoughts; she had, as “Maidenhood” does sometimes, deified him. And now that he too could stumble like the common herd, and even “accuse, wanting proof,” he was no longer the deity she could worship. Miss Barrymore’s secret shrine became tenantless—empty. Of this change Miss Barrymore was quite aware. It gave her rather pleasure than pain. She was no longer nervous in Mr. Hamilton’s presence; she rather rejoiced that she had escaped from what she now called “an infatuation.” “Maidenhood” uses different terms for the same thing. And from this moment she determined never to “deify” another until she knew more of him than she had ever known of Mr. Hamilton.

So difficult is it to find an “idol” so sufficiently excellent as to satisfy the “purity” and “peerlessness” of early “Maidenhood.” Mr. Hamilton, as we have before said, had high ideas of the “purity and peerlessness” of women; perhaps he had not considered that “accusation” would naturally ruffle the “purity” he so prized, and that a “false accusation” would turn the balance against him.

“Peerlessness” cannot, without sullyng its own superiority, and changing its very essence, “peerlessness” cannot stoop to anything false.

Now, Mr. Hamilton was quite unaware of the fact that he had ever had a pedestal in Miss Barrymore’s imagination. It was unknown to him that he had lost a position, uncrowned himself. In extreme ignorance of his present standing in Miss Barrymore’s estimation, Mr. Hamilton had no regret for his late unwarrantable conduct. He felt great pleasure in the easy flow of conversation with Miss Barrymore ; he admired her courteous and elegant manners, and was rather grateful than otherwise that he had, so to speak, “demeaned” himself by this “false accusation,” since it had been a means of convincing him of Miss Barrymore’s great “peerlessness and purity.”

Mr. Hamilton knew that he was “trying very hard” to create a favourable appreciation of himself. But Mr. Hamilton was “in the dark” as applied to the past, and could not see far into the future, or he would have known it was one thing to place an idol on an empty shrine, properly prepared for its reception, and another to pick up the shattered fragments, put the pieces together, and *then* replace this disfigured “idol” on its former shrine. “If ignorance is bliss,” as the proverb saith, and if the bliss be in proportion to the ignorance, Mr. Hamilton must needs have been extremely happy on this occasion.

When he arose to take leave, he held Miss

Barrymore's hand perhaps a second longer than etiquette, strictly speaking, required. That was much for Mr. Hamilton, and it would have been the means of conveying to the Lady Irene, if so great a lapse from propriety had happened from him to her, that the *distingué* Mr. Hamilton was at length subdued, and that she had nothing now to do but make the most of her present position eventually to win! But matters of ceremony affect people differently, and, as in this instance, Miss Barrymore understood the refinement of etiquette quite as well as Mr. Hamilton, so she determined he should not be allowed to transgress rules of state with her. She had stoutly refused in her own mind, even though most courteous and affable during his visit, to allow him to rise in her estimation, and now she determined to make him understand he was not privileged to break through rules with her. Miss Barrymore's reserved and rather haughty demeanour, following so closely upon her gracious urbanity, made the very punctilious Mr. Hamilton feel, as he left the room, *half ashamed* of the very slight liberty he had taken.

"No, no, Mr. Hamilton, no," said the lady, as soon as she knew she was alone; "if, as I hope, I have convinced you 'a Barrymore will never trapan a woman to her hurt,' so, sir, 'a Barrymore will never allow the smallest latitude to a man.' I am not accustomed to receive gentlemen morning visitors at unearthly hours, or to have *my* hand detained even for a second. I shall give strict orders

that no gentlemen be admitted on any pretence whatsoever, at Heraldstowe, until dear grandpapa is seated in his library. The protection of his presence is of importance to me, especially when gentlemen presume——”

Miss Barrymore walked up and down the room apparently in thought, stopping occasionally, as if weighing this and that in her mind, then she suddenly said aloud,

“Mr. Hamilton, I have done with you.”

We have often written, “Poor Grel!” we may now say, “Poor Mr. Hamilton!”

Now, as we have seen the effect of this breach of etiquette on Miss Barrymore—which Mr. Hamilton had so thoroughly understood—the effect on her had been to destroy complaisance and produce haughtiness! And this haughtiness—so strangely are different people moved—produced in him a *great satisfaction* and an *added pleasure*!

Mr. Hamilton mounted his horse, and galloped away in high spirits!

“I admire her; I admire her extremely—so dignified, so handsome, so queenly.” Mr. Hamilton actually “chuckled” to himself when he recalled that very slight breach of punctilio on his part, and its immediate effect on Miss Barrymore. “A thorough lady, charmingly well-bred, none more so in the entire county of Z——” This last remark must be considered very great praise, for the “county of Z——” was undoubtedly the most aristocratic county in England!—and justly cele-

brated for the high breeding of the ladies.

"All things happen for the best." Mr. Hamilton was thinking how grieved he had been to displace Grel from that secret shrine of his, and how uncomfortable he himself had felt with this empty pedestal on his hands. "It is just possible she" (Mr. Hamilton meant Grel) "might not have understood this small breach of decorum—and then—why of course *I* should have been '*disgusted*,' and thought her a forward little minx—and she does act in a strange, unladylike way, sometimes, I must confess." Mr. Hamilton comforted himself by this last remark, inasmuch as it certainly proved *he ought* to feel "*disgusted*," and think of her "as a forward minx."

Young maidens! All ye who read this truthful chronicle—learn from the chronicler, if you do not already know, that Mr. Hamilton is no exception to a common rule. When ladies permit even slight liberties from gentlemen to whom they are not betrothed—without showing their annoyance—gentlemen become "*disgusted*."

When Mr. Hamilton reached home, and joined his mother and sister at luncheon, he declared he never had enjoyed a ride more in his life. The elasticity of his spirits, the sparkling of his eye, and the consciously happy expression of his face, were read by the two ladies in the same moment. And when they were again alone, one said,

"Fulke is in love." The other replied, "And more: He has offered, and been accepted."

The two ladies rejoiced in this fact, for fact they felt morally certain it must be.

Some people say "they only believe *half* they hear." Perhaps if these ladies had credited "the half" instead of "the whole" of their surmise, they had been nearer the truth!

CHAPTER XXIII.

"ONE MAD ACTION IS NOT ENOUGH TO PROVE A MAN
MAD."

"THE Hamiltons accept," said Miss Maynooth
to her brother.

"That is well," said he. "Then I will ride to Heraldstowe and tell Zara to come and bring Sir Hildebrand."

"The Barrymores, Raymond! Why not Lady Irene and Lord Danby?"

"Hamilton must be amused, and he is tired of my sister Irene—that is, if he ever cared for her."

"You *do* talk so absurdly, Raymond, on some subjects, I am in dread of what you may say next, when any one is present."

"Whether the happiness I enjoy creates the absurdity you speak of, or the absurdity the happiness, is at present unknown to me. I have not time to analyze either the absurdity or the happiness, and yet I may admit that the difficulties of my

position only increase my content, and your wisdom would be the better occupied, by waiting quietly for results, rather than cultivating a 'dread' of my opinions."

"But, Raymond, everybody says Mr. Hamilton is engaged to the Lady Irene Stuart, therefore *she* ought to be invited."

"Yolande, Yolande!" said Mr. Maynooth, shaking his head, "why did you not tell me that before? You said Hamilton wanted 'Grel.' I knew you were wrong, and yet foolishly gave way. However, we need not go through that subject again. Hamilton must have somebody, that is, if he marry, and we must invite somebody to amuse him on Thursday—or to be amused by him; but that can be settled on the day. And if I can manage to keep him employed or amused until Grel returns from her wedding tour, we can then invite him to our wedding, and let him see, as he cannot have Grel, he had better look out for some other lady; that is, if he wish to marry—for clearly he cannot have Grel then."

Eventually the party at Mitreberis consisted of Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton and Mrs. Fulke Hamilton, Captain and Miss Fortescue, Sir Hildebrand and Miss Barrymore, and Dr. Quinn. It was at this luncheon that Mr. Maynooth convinced himself Mr. Hamilton admired Miss Barrymore.

Not only was Miss Barrymore blind to Mr. Hamilton's devotion, but she still treated him with as much constraint as was consistent with perfect

good-breeding. She allowed herself to be perfectly at ease with Captain Fortescue—even though nursing her reserve towards Mr. Hamilton, whose conversational powers were great. She took her full share in the topics that became general; but, from a sense of what was due to herself, as well as that Mr. Hamilton was no longer a favourite, she spoke as little as possible to him.

And now we think it unnecessary to transcribe Miss Maynooth's letter to Mistress Nuala Maynooth. We think the reply from the latter lady will be sufficiently explanatory of the state of things at Mitreberis:—

“Chamouni, —.

“MY DEAR YOLANDE,

“We make progress very much to our mutual satisfaction. The only thing that happened to disturb our complete enjoyment was a letter from Irene to her cousin Grel—a most absurd letter, and it caused poor Grel a few moments of consternation, which, after listening to me, she wisely put aside and became her charming self once more. What odd ideas people *do* take into their very sagacious heads! Of course you have heard the report, though *you*, my dear, have been too wise to mention it—the report that ‘Almeric and Grel had run off together.’ What will the world say next?—perhaps that *I* have ‘run away’ with Sir Hildebrand! I could be indignant, but that it is too absurd. The dear girl has not been out of my sight since we left England, and Almeric only

travelled to Town with us. There, that is enough on that stupid subject!

“As for Raymond, take my advice—*let him alone*. In mine own private judgment, all the learning in the world—and Raymond is unusually learned—will not prevent men from being *mad* once in their lives. Strange, Yolande, but true.

“Now, if we saw a mad dog, or a mad buffalo, we should not attempt to turn either animal from his mad career; do the same by the male of our species, my dear. Let them have their mad fits when they please, free from any restraint on our part. Indeed, I have always found men are much more tractable with us, or to our desires and wills, when we keep to the habit of never infringing on theirs. I make it a rule, my dear Yolande, always to let a man have his own way, as dear Sir Hildebrand will tell you, for though we have known each other more than five-and-twenty years, we have never quarrelled. This is certainly the result, as all reasonable people will allow, of our mutual desire never to interfere with each other; and I can honestly and conscientiously aver, my dear, we *never have* interfered with each other, excepting in so far—of course I mean—as we could mutually contribute to each other's happiness. But to return to Raymond.

“For my part, I always did think all natural history the same. Is not the cuckoo *mad* to place her egg in the nest of the hedge-sparrow? We must admit it is not sane. Is not the poor spar-

row *mad* to turn out, or to allow its own young to be turned out of its own nice cozy nest, and all for the sake of her step-child, the cuckoo? A pattern to human stepmothers, I allow, but still even this is not sane.

“And then again, my dear Yolande, we should ever bear in mind that the men who are the *maddest* in their love will probably turn out the *sanest* after marriage. That says much for madmen in general. Fancy the maddest men becoming the most peaceable, tractable, and quiet husbands of families afterwards! This either is, or ought to be, a great consideration and consolation to women. Loving indulgent husbands, giving them everything the world can produce, which I feel sure such madmen would—that is to say, if only the women were sufficiently wise and sufficiently in their own interests to let the men have their own way. I should make a great point of that. Indeed, indeed, Yolande, as I have said, *all* natural history is the same, and the natural history of man is just the same as that of the elephant or the squirrel—man is no exception, believe me, to the madness of animals generally.

“Now that I reflect again on the subject—I acknowledge man is set upon a pinnacle, and ought to know the best of everything, and, for that matter, he certainly does—much better even than the mighty elephant; and perhaps, my dear, that is one reason why he is *madder* than the rest of creation when the fit takes him.

“Even Solomon, the wisest of men, was not free. Do not mistake me, and think I mean Nabuchodonosor—I really mean Solomon the Wise. Read Dr. Kitto—he calls Solomon ‘the wise fool.’ Very true, my dear—too true, alas! I may say. Oh! my dearest Yolande, we are strangely and wonderfully made! And now, having said so much on the subject of males in general, I cannot help asking myself if the females of all known species have mad fits; and at this moment I bethink me that of course the cuckoo is female, laying its egg, and so I conclude madness clings to females as well as males, though perhaps they may have more shyness and timidity in their nature, consequently be less noticed at the time of their madness. It would be awkward if all the world went mad at the same time. Probably that is the reason that we see isolated specimens of madness, so that the sane part of the species may keep all things right, and each take his or her turn in the disease when his fellow man or woman is cured, as the case may be.

“But, my dear, in the midst of my argument, I am tempted to ask—What is wisdom? You say Raymond has been radiantly happy during this long mad fit; tell me, then, can all the wisdom of the earth make him more happy?

“Let him *enjoy* his madness while he can.

“And then again I say to myself—What is folly? We who think ourselves *wise* load our hearts and minds with cares and anxieties and

problems for the future ; these do not add to our happiness—on the contrary, they make us unhappy. Therefore, it would seem, my dear, though I confess it sounds eccentric, we who know we are sane have all the folly and all the grief—he whom we know to be *mad* has all the happiness.

“Let Raymond *enjoy* his madness.

“And now to touch upon another part of your letter. I am perfectly willing to remove, or, as he very *wisely* says, in spite of his madness, be removed from Wolfscrag to Mitreberis. Of course, if he have determined to marry, he will require the larger mansion, and he has my entire consent to make any change he pleases during my absence. I can thoroughly trust my interests with him, and it will save me much trouble to find all things ready to my hands on my return.

“As for Grel, she thinks herself as free from any attachment as it is possible for one so much admired to be. I am sure Raymond has *not* proposed. Between ourselves, I wish he had. *She* almost unconsciously likes Mr. Hamilton. I have gathered that from her unreserved talk. Another thing, my dear, she is a little bit ‘afraid’ of him. Now many women have a sort of undefined ‘fear’ of the gentleman they prefer—a fact I cannot explain ; but as I see this ‘fear’ in Grel—indeed, she very innocently acknowledges it—I conclude there is an under-current of ‘love’ for Mr. Hamilton that a single word from him to Grel might discover to her. And so, as

Raymond has not yet proposed, I fear he has but little chance of securing Grel. She will make a charming wife to some fortunate man, Hamilton or not. She has read and reflected much; but, for want of having mixed more with the world, she is quite unsophisticated, and not a little shy. Her natural timidity has been nurtured by Miss Cheetham's sarcasms and petty jealousies. She was not a fit companion for Grel Stuart; I marvel that she, Grel, has stood so severe a trial so well, and comes out so scathless. She is now very handsome, elegant, and attractive; she has become much more self-possessed, and looks two or three years older on that account. I cannot but bid Raymond beware. We know well, to men who have seen much of the world—like our neighbour at the Abbey, for instance—there is a great charm in a self-reliant, queenly manner. Mr. Hamilton certainly admires Grel—remember the Heraldstowe *fête*; and once again I must hint I think Raymond has but little chance, all things considered.

“Upon reflection, Yolande, I do not think we shall do any good by pointing out to Raymond Grel's preference for Mr. Hamilton. When a man is *mad*, he follows, as a matter of course, a mad career, and the *sane* of his species have no power over him. Let him *enjoy* his madness while he can. When a man is mad, he is his own keeper. Very sad, my dear, but very true. Farewell, &c.”

CHAPTER XXIV.

“ BY ART AND DECEIT MEN LIVE HALF A YEAR, AND BY
DECEIT AND ART THE OTHER HALF.”

DR. QUINN called at Heraldstowe to make inquiries after his patient, Almeric Barrymore. Dr. Quinn had ascertained that Almeric, on passing through London, had *not* seen his learned friend, Dr. James Lemmens Kirkby, who was so extremely clever in cases such as that now in his own hands. It was to be lamented—much to be lamented—because, though Dr. Quinn hoped so much from Almeric’s tour, and would have had a more certain hope if only the tour had been taken earlier—though he, Dr. Quinn, had so strong a hope, he had a still stronger desire for the support of his learned friend. He had himself stated Almeric’s case very fully to Dr. James Lemmens Kirkby, and though this gentleman quite agreed with Dr. Quinn in opinion, and concurred with him in the idea that separation from the scene of the origin of his illness was absolutely necessary, still, it would have been a great comfort to Dr. Quinn, under the circumstances, if his learned friend had himself examined Mr. Almeric Barrymore.

On this morning, now that Almeric had been absent a fortnight, he called to ask Miss Barrymore for Almeric’s address. His friend, Dr.

James Lemmens Kirkby, had suggested to him a means of uprooting the malady that had been so severely distressing to Mr. Barrymore and his relatives. Dr. Quinn wished to talk over with Miss Barrymore the actual facts of the case, so as to be morally certain of the *cause* of the illness, &c. He then again went into the story of the cabinet doors having been left open, the coins lost, with all of which the reader is well acquainted. And once more, Dr. Quinn satisfied himself that Mr. Almerie Barrymore had taken up the notion that during the time the cabinet doors stood open, some one had stolen the coin, and that Almerie believed it never had been caught in the *ruche* of Sara Thorn's dress, and dropped in crossing the Park, as everyone else felt certain had been the case.

"I think I can comfort you now, Miss Barrymore," said the doctor, as, with a meaning smile, he drew forth a letter. "I need not read all that is said by my learned friend, but in glancing at his letter I shall be able to explain with sufficient clearness. If you recollect, when I had last the honour of dining at Heraldstowe, there had been some suggestion of disturbing the turf in the Park. To this plan your brother was extremely averse, alleging, in peremptory tones, that '*the coin was not there.*'"

"I remember," said Miss Barrymore—"dear Almerie was always greatly averse to having the Park so cut up."

“And so ‘uselessly’—so uselessly—did he not use those very words, and add, for *it is not there?*”

“Yes. Almeric certainly seemed very positive that the coin would not be found in the Park, though, humanly speaking, it was the only place in which we could expect to find it, because our two friends walked that way each to her own home.”

“Exactly—exactly so. That makes the strength of our position,” said Dr. Quinn, tapping his friend’s letter as he spoke; “and, therefore, I feel myself fully justified in the step I mean to take, and I think I may promise you that now we shall do away with this bugbear, and probably be able to recall your brother to his home in a very short time.”

Miss Barrymore, as may well be understood, was made very happy by this announcement, and Dr. Quinn at once unfolded his project.

“I shall write to your brother, and tell him it is a suggestion from my very clever friend,” said he, again tapping the letter he held in his hand. “I claim no merit on that score—‘honour to whom honour is due,’” added he, as he now raised the letter high in his hand, that Miss Barrymore might thereby understand he delighted to honour his learned and talented friend, Dr. James Lemmens Kirkby. “It is his suggestion.”

All this time Miss Barrymore listened attentively, and watched Dr. Quinn’s movements with some surprise, and he having, we suppose, suffi-

ciently excited her curiosity, lowered the letter, stooped his head, and said, in a very gentle voice,

"I shall myself write to Mr. Almeric Barrymore and tell him *we have discovered the thief!*"

And having delivered himself of this decision, Dr. Quinn drew himself up, leaned back in his chair, and fixed his eyes on Miss Barrymore, as much as to say,

"Now, what *do* you think of that? A more wonderfully ingenious plan of compelling the demon to come out of a man, could surely never have been suggested!"

Miss Barrymore only stared at Dr. Quinn; she found her tongue refuse to say, "Dr. Quinn, your assertion is false!"

"Yes, I shall tell him, that we have, by the most wonderful chance in the world—*found the thief!*"

Miss Barrymore felt her respiration oppressed while she listened in the utmost astonishment to this false statement of facts, and after a little inward struggle she overcame her alarm sufficiently to say, in very low and faltering tones,

"But we have not."

Dr. Quinn paid no attention to this short and gentle reply, he proceeded with his explanation—

"And by having found the 'thief,' we do away with the bugbear that has up to this time oppressed Mr. Barrymore. He will begin to recover as soon as this news reaches him; he will be satisfied that his idea was the correct one, from the first to the last!"

Miss Barrymore remained silent from the depths of her astonishment!

"You do not credit me?" said Dr. Quinn, leaning forward with a gracious smile lighting up his countenance; "but I have known more extraordinary things than this—much more!" continued he, with a wise shake of his head.

"I do not doubt that," said Miss Barrymore, glad at heart that she could at length say something in return for all Dr. Quinn's kindness. "I am sure you must, in your great experience, know of very many strange things." And then gathering courage as she went on, she added, "But as we have '*not found the thief*,' it appears to me that when Almeric returns we shall be just where we are now."

"And why so, pray?" said Dr. Quinn, with a slight shade of irritability in his tone.

"If we had discovered the thief, we should again possess the coin; and as we have not this, Alme—"

"Allow me, allow me," said Dr. Quinn, interrupting and putting up his hand. "Excuse me, if I point out to you, it does not follow that if we find the thief, we also find the coin!—the thief may have thrown it into the melting-pot, or sold it to a Jew, or buried it in the earth. It is not the finding *the coin* that is essential to us in this case, but the thief! *the thief!* who has all this time been haunting the brain of your brother! We must catch him!"

Dr. Quinn again leaned back in his chair, while

his countenance was expressive of much internal satisfaction.

Miss Barrymore now saw "the thief" from quite a different point of view. As an inhabitant of her brother Almeric's brain, she was willing to credit Dr. Quinn's assertion "that *he* had found the thief." And if Dr. Quinn required her assistance in attempting to dislodge this "thief," upon this new view of the case she was quite willing to give all the help in her power.

"I am sure I thank you very much, for all the trouble you have taken with my dear brother. And if you think this plan so sure of a favourable result, I can but do as you require, and give you Almeric's address."

Dr. Quinn's professional caution stepped in now, and he said,

"As sure as we mortals can be of anything. But I must not fail to apprise you that this peculiar disease has more quips and quirks than any other in the list of our practice. Morally speaking, I hold the cure in my hand." Here he again held on high the letter of his friend Dr. James Lemmens Kirkby. "But I must not make myself answerable for what may have happened since my dear young friend left Heraldstowe. Such cases are loaded with difficulties that only the Faculty can comprehend," said he, as he lowered the letter, stooped from his erect position, and smiled condescendingly. "I feel it is true that I have the means of comfort at my very fingers' ends." Dr.

Quinn laughed, at his own facetiousness ; “and if you will kindly favour me with Mr. Barrymore’s address, I will go to work with hearty good will.”

“That I am sure of,” said Miss Barrymore, as she immediately arose and wrote the address.

Dr. Quinn very soon afterwards took leave.

Miss Barrymore—with an unaccountable misgiving—did not rely on Dr. Quinn’s remedy with the same faith as he himself did.

CHAPTER XXV.

“LOVE IS THE TOUCHSTONE OF VIRTUE.”

SCARCELY had Dr. Quinn left Heraldstowe when Miss Barrymore heard sounds of another arrival. Some gentleman visitor, she supposed, who had been shown in to Sir Hildebrand, and who, after remaining for perhaps an hour, took his departure just before the usual hour for Sir Hildebrand’s drive. Miss Barrymore had not troubled herself to inquire who had called, and Sir Hildebrand drove away without seeing her. His own man, Jasper, went on the box of the carriage with the coachman ; this was customary, when neither Zara nor Almeric was with him, to prevent Sir Hildebrand being alone, if he were troubled with any slight attack of indisposition, to which he was occasionally subject ; the remedies for which were

understood by Jasper. On his return, as was usual, he dressed for dinner. In due course of time dinner was announced, and Sir Hildebrand and Miss Barrymore sat down to dinner. The usual number of domestics attended upon them, and also in due course of time the dinner came to an end; the fruits were left standing, the wines were placed in Sir Hildebrand's reach, the domestics took their departure, and Sir Hildebrand and Miss Barrymore were left by themselves. These were the ordinary events of ordinary days, and Miss Barrymore herself was in no way prepared for the advent of anything extraordinary.

Nevertheless, when Sir Hildebrand had had his first glass of wine, and solaced himself with a pinch of snuff; when Zara had lamented that the evenings drew in so rapidly, and that they should soon be obliged to have artificial light during dinner; when Sir Hildebrand had listened and replied to these nothings, he suddenly drew himself up in his chair, and said,

"I want to say a few words to you, my darling, now that we are alone. I want to announce to you an event that has given me—me—great satisfaction, my dear. Only, remember this—I am far from wishing to interfere with the authority due from a parent to a child, that is, on this particular occasion."

It was clear to Miss Barrymore that Sir Hildebrand had given the subject, whatever it might be, considerable thought. He so generally spoke im-

pulsively, and with his heart on his tongue, that, as she afterwards confessed to herself, she was glad that the sun had gone down, and that the moon's beams were so trifling as only to show darkness visible—glad that the room was becoming a little dark and dismal, and that her own, partly astonishment, partly fear, could not be seen by Sir Hildebrand. Miss Barrymore, nevertheless, and in spite of her fear, left her chair at the head of the table, and seating herself close to Sir Hildebrand, and laying her hand gently on his, said,

“My own dear grandpapa, I trust I shall always give you the honour, obedience, devotion, and affection of a child; you cannot doubt me, and in a matter that gives you, my dear grandpapa,” and she stooped and kissed his hand, “so much gratification, pray depend upon my desire to be satisfied also.”

Ah! Miss Barrymore had not the most remote idea of the subject that had such charms for, and gave such entire contentment to Sir Hildebrand. And though she felt herself kept in terrible suspense, and that the natural result of that suspense was a dread of some coming evil, she bowed her head to the expected storm, and ceased to speak.

“Yes, my dear, I know such entire obedience has ever been a part of your character; but that is just the very thing, that is, in this case, I wish to set aside. I have thought a great deal of it during my drive.”

Miss Barrymore had easily surmised that without being told.

"And I lamented Almeric's absence the more," continued Sir Hildebrand, "because he and I could so well have talked it over, and between us perhaps we should have succeeded in making you comprehend that in this case there must be no interference."

"No interference?" thought she—"no interference of what kind or nature? And what could be the extraordinary occasion in which Sir Hildebrand wished to set aside his parental authority?"

For a few seconds Miss Barrymore remained silent. She then said, "Yes, grandpapa," because she did not understand or know how to reply.

"I cannot interfere, my dear; I have always said in my own mind I never would. I have thought much on the subject during my drive, and I have satisfied myself that I take a right view of a serious subject. Some fathers think themselves called upon to use their authority to the utmost on these occasions; if they think so, my dear, they are right to act up to their convictions. I do not."

There was something inexpressibly gentle in the old man's voice, and something very loving in the way he detained her hand and caressed it. But though she felt all that Sir Hildebrand said was in a deep spirit of affection for herself, Miss Barrymore could not conquer a strong shiver of dread in the expectation of some great evil. Her intellect seemed to catch up and retain the last words of a sentence, and only see the meaning in their isolation from the former part.

"He does not act up to his convictions," thought she; "oh! I am sure he is ill; he does not know what he is saying. Poor dear grandpapa!"

And as she did not know how to reply to so unexpected an announcement, she stooped and tenderly kissed the hands that were so lovingly caressing hers.

"You have guessed, my darling, by this time."

Sir Hildebrand's hand was now placed upon the head that was bowed upon his knee.

"And may the Almighty bless you, my darling, in your career through this life, as you, my love, have always been a blessing to me! And may He answer favourably the prayer of an old man, and allow him to meet *all* his darlings in heaven at last!"

The old man bowed *his* head now; Miss Barrymore arose, and putting her arms round his neck, only murmured a few loving words in reply. Then she poured out wine for him, and as she took the empty glass from his hands, he said,

"You have guessed, my darling, that I have this morning received proposals in form for your hand."

"Proposals in form!" thought she, but she only said, "Yes, grandpapa," as she reseated herself on the low stool at his knee and allowed his hand to rest upon her head.

There were a few seconds of silence after Miss Barrymore's murmured "Yes, grandpapa," during which the old man stooped to kiss her forehead, and

then raised one of her hands caressingly to his lips, while she said to herself, "Who?"

Thought is always very much at our command on these extraordinary occasions, and on this particular one he had in his rapid evolutions careered over the county of Z—— by the end of the third second of time, and placed before Miss Barrymore's astonished eyes the handsome faces of many well-known friends. Her thought did not linger upon any one in particular; the shadows of many seemed to pass in review in her mind's eye, and add to rather than diminish the dread that had already taken possession of her. She did not rest her eye upon any one figure with a wish to detain it, and as they came unbidden, so they vanished unregretted, and Miss Barrymore was no wiser for the pageant.

"I wish to do my duty, my love—I wish you to know that *I* think most highly of him; perhaps even more highly of him than of any gentleman in our entire circle of friends."

The magic mirror now conjured up beings nearer home. Mr. Hamilton, upon whom her lip curled in scorn; Mr. Maynooth, whom she pooh-poohed away with a smile.

"His position is all that the most ambitious father can desire," resumed Sir Hildebrand, and the magic mirror of thought became clear and bright in an instant, and showed to Miss Barrymore the very handsome face and figure of Lord Danby!

"Poor dear grandpapa, how he *is* mistaken!" thought she.

"His family is as old and as chivalrous as our own. He told me he had not said a single word to you. My dear, I honour him above all things for his straightforward manliness."

Miss Barrymore, if she had expressed her thoughts, would have said, "That it was unlike Lord Danby to restrain himself in the expression of his most transient feelings, that is, if he could thereby amuse himself; but that if her dear grandpapa thought he had proved his 'straightforward manliness' by *not* speaking to her, she supposed it was all right."

Miss Barrymore, however, remained silent, and Sir Hildebrand said in cheerful tones, as he patted her head kindly, .

"You will know at once, my darling, who has proposed, it is so like the man!" Sir Hildebrand raised his voice in his thorough appreciation of such gentlemanly conduct on the part of Miss Barrymore's admirer, and then suddenly dropped it as he said, "But, my love, with all these advantages on his side, they are nothing to me unless you, my dear, have a preference for him—for *him*—the man himself." He paused for a few seconds, and then continued slowly, "Let no state and station, let no outward appearance bias your judgment on an occasion of this sort. If you love him—that is, eventually I mean—if you love him, I give my consent; if you do not——"

"But *who*, dear grandpapa?" murmured Miss Barrymore.

"Who!" said Sir Hildebrand in a tone of intense surprise; "Mr. Hamilton, to be sure! Of whom could I speak in such high terms of praise?—whose family, in this neighbourhood, is 'as old and as chivalrous as our own,' but Mr. Hamilton's? There are the Maynooths, certainly, but, my love, I do not suppose such old friends as you and Raymond have been falling in love with each other." And Sir Hildebrand laughed pleasantly, and turned to help himself to another glass of wine.

Meanwhile Miss Barrymore had time to recover somewhat from the shock of this announcement. She remained silent, and rather indignant than gratified. When she recalled Sir Hildebrand's words, "that his straightforward manliness was like the man," she inwardly acknowledged "Yes, it is like Mr. Hamilton. But somehow or other—Mr. Hamilton! Not Lord Danby—that pleases me. But—Mr. Hamilton!"

Sir Hildebrand interrupted the intense whirl and entanglement of thought that consumed her by saying,

"You see, my dear, Mr. Hamilton evidently understood what he ought to do in a case of this sort. Some men of this present day, I am sorry to say, my dear, do not. He came so properly to me to announce his wish to know more of you, to have my permission to visit here freely, and to see as much of you as the courtesies of society would

permit. I told him, until I had spoken to you I could not, of course, encourage him. For though I admitted to him, as one gentleman may to another, that he had my full permission to see you daily and love you dearly, as I assured him you very richly deserved, he knew that it was my duty to seek you and first ascertain from you if there was any decided objection to his visits—any preference for any other gentleman, and——” but Sir Hildebrand paused.

Miss Barrymore, if she had replied with courage and truthfully, would have said impulsively, “Tell him I do not like him,” but the thought of her dear old grandpapa prevented this. For his sake she remained silent. And Sir Hildebrand, interpreting this silence as “maidenly reserve,” sought to comfort her, and said,

“Do not distress yourself, my dear; you shall have plenty of time to think the matter well over.”

Miss Barrymore was so grateful for this reprieve, that she said in very congenial tones, as she stooped to kiss his hand,

“Thanks, dear papa.”

“Certainly, my dear, you shall have time. You are not required, my dear, to admit Mr. Hamilton as your accepted lover, you——”

“Not!” said Miss Barrymore, in much astonishment.

“Certainly not, my dear—though, of course, if all things go well, as I most sincerely hope and trust they will, you will eventually do so. These

present proposals from Mr. Hamilton to you, my dear, will *not* be announced to the county. They are only preliminary. An honourable man admires you, my dear, and feels sure, if he had an opportunity of knowing you better, that he should love you—yes, *dearly*, my love—I feel *sure* he would. But then, as you at present know little or nothing of him, naturally enough he would like to—to *try* to win you, my dear; and I heartily pray, my darling, that he may, and that you may love him as, I am sure, he richly deserves; only, as I have said, I will not interfere—I will not bias you in the least; I wish you to be free as air, and you *are* free as air—until, if things go well, as I cannot help hoping they will, Mr. Hamilton himself will propose to you, my darling, and God for ever bless you both!”

The old man was again overcome, and during Miss Barrymore’s attention to him, she had time to recover from her own consternation. She had been greatly relieved when she found this was *not* to be an actual engagement; if she eventually made up her mind to allow of Mr. Hamilton’s visits in deference to her grandfather’s wishes, and with a strong desire not to disappoint him, if she could help it, she thought this she must do; *but* to be continually under the dread of Mr. Hamilton’s proposals to herself unnerved her, and took away her happiness for the time being. Nevertheless, she smothered all expression of her own feelings, and rang the bell at Sir Hildebrand’s

desire. Palmer entered, with the lamp burning brightly, and Sir Hildebrand said :

“Bring a bottle of Burgundy, Palmer.”

And when the wine was brought, Sir Hildebrand said, as he raised his glass to his lips,

“Not to Mr. Hamilton, howsoever much I may admire him, do I pledge this glass ; but to him to whom my darling Zara shall eventually give her heart.”

When the two met in the drawing-room, Sir Hildebrand would not have his accustomed game at chess. He liked to sit musing in his chair—building castles in the air, no doubt—and to hear Zara sing. But when the long evening was over—for it was unusually long to Miss Barrymore, who so much wished to think over her position—when the evening was over, and Sir Hildebrand had bid her good night, and blessed her with a pathos and a solemnity more than usual, then Miss Barrymore was free—free to think, and to analyze her thoughts.

On retiring to her own room she did not dismiss her maid in any unusual haste ; she went through the duties of the night toilette as on any ordinary occasion, and only when she was entirely alone did she give expression to her long pent-up surprise.

“Mr. Hamilton !” said she, and she locked the door of her dressing-room. She walked a few paces, and saw herself reflected in a large cheval glass ; she stopped, and surveyed herself from

head to foot. "Mr. Hamilton!" said she, as if addressing the figure in the glass—"I certainly did pour out the vials of my wrath on the head of Mr. Hamilton." She clasped her hands together, and stood in an attitude of thought; after a few minutes of silence, she said again, "Mr. Hamilton!" She raised her head, and looked wonderingly around the room, then again turned to contemplate the figure in the glass, and said, "Mr. Hamilton!" Eventually she got into bed, and laying her head on the pillow, she murmured, "Mr. Hamilton," and fell asleep.

On the morrow, when Miss Barrymore awoke, greatly refreshed by her night's rest, she was conscious of a something unusual—of a something that she thought had happened recently, to disturb her. She could not at first recal the circumstance, whatever it might have been. She did not remain longer in bed on this account, but starting up, and wrapping herself in the handsome silk dressing-gown she had worn on the previous evening, she saw herself in the glass as she passed to the bathroom, and stopping, and gazing upon herself, she said: "Mr. Hamilton!"

It seemed that no occurrence could more have surprised Miss Barrymore. As she had on a former occasion acknowledged to herself, Mr. Hamilton had never singled her out for his deferential attentions, as, it had been whispered, was the case with the Lady Irene. The Barry-

mores had never been on very intimate terms with the Hamiltons, because the ladies of the latter house visited so little; and besides that, the gentleman was so dignified; his courtesy was as lofty as Sir Hildebrand's, though he had much less suavity. Still, as Miss Barrymore could not deny to herself, she had always admired Mr. Hamilton from a sense of his superiority over all other gentlemen in the neighbourhood; and only on the occasion given at full length in a former chapter, had the scales fallen from her eyes—had she learned, so to speak, that even “Mr. Hamilton” was *not* perfect.

Miss Barrymore did not seem to be able to unravel the riddle that this very “Mr. Hamilton” should come with proposals to her grandfather, or, rather, with a request that he might be allowed to visit at Heraldstowe for the purpose of knowing more of Miss Barrymore, and of trying to propitiate her in his own favour, if she had no other attachment. She acknowledged this was all very grand, and quite in accordance with what might be expected from so ceremonious a gentleman. She knew, also, that her grandfather, Sir Hildebrand, was very much gratified not only that Mr. Hamilton had sought her, but that he had come forwards in that peculiar manner—that he had respected the barriers of etiquette, and abided by them.

Miss Barrymore was not quite sure that she did care much for such parade, but she wisely put aside

all argument on the subject. Nevertheless, for all the grandeur and ostentation that encumbered these "proposals in form," Miss Barrymore could only iterate, "Mr. Hamilton!"

She breakfasted alone. Sir Hildebrand was always late, and had chocolate in his dressing-room. She read her letters; she gave audience to the housekeeper, and made arrangements for the day with her usual propriety and judgment, and then she went to the morning room.

Here, as in her dressing-room on the previous night, after she had dismissed her maid, she once more gave expression to the thoughts that unbidden crowded so rapidly into her brain.

"That sublime Mr. Hamilton, of all people in the world!"

She walked up and down the room, contemplating herself in the mirrors as she passed.

"Ah! I see, I must learn to pace the room with more dignity."

She drew herself up and walked slowly from one end to the other, then she burst into a very enjoyable laugh.

"I wonder if dear grandpapa can lend me a copy of Sir Charles Grandison? I feel sure I should find excellent advice, and probably very suitable for my present position, in its learned pages."

Another little silvery laugh filled the room, and Miss Barrymore resumed—

"I must certainly learn to make slow and solemn curtseys, each one half an hour long."

Miss Barrymore curtsied to herself in the glass, and again she laughed.

"Oh! it is all of no use! I feel sure I shall never be sufficiently grand and solemn for—Mr. Hamilton!"

She remained standing for a few minutes, and leaning upon a chair; then she again broke the silence.

"I suppose dear grandpapa would be very sad and very much disappointed if I did not allow the gentleman—a chance. I suppose I must, for in spite of all that he has done to offend me, he is a thorough gentleman, and I have a certain appreciation of his well-known good qualities, that, upon reflection, is pleasurable to me. Only, how I shall manage to get on with so much sublimity I have yet to learn. Most people say this manner suits Mr. Hamilton. I do not deny that, to a certain extent, it has perhaps an effect on others, whether favourable or not to Mr. Hamilton, I am still in doubt."

She paused, and again consulted the mirror, then resumed—"But, if I am to be wooed *à la* Sir Charles Grandison, it will be above all things necessary that I get up the part of Harriet Biron!"

At this point the comic view in her mind's eye overpowered her; Miss Barrymore laughed aloud, and going hastily to the piano, she began to play with great spirit a rollicking tune, and a great favourite with Almeric Barrymore and Raymond Maynooth. The tune itself, it must be acknow-

ledged, was a very suitable tune for the very elegant fingers of a Mrs. Hamilton elect. The refrain even more suitable for the illustrious ears of a Mr. Hamilton, of Prellsthorpe Abbey. "The Three Jolly Dogs" was the name of the tune, "Slap Bang, here we are again!" the refrain.

On former occasions, when Miss Barrymore had played this tune to please, as she then thought, the debased taste of Almeric or Raymond, she had rather disliked it than otherwise. But on this particular morning, that particular tune gave her great pleasure; she rattled over the keys and returned again and again to the "Slap, bang, here we are again!" &c.

As faithful chroniclers, it is our duty to state this was a newly-awakened pleasure to Miss Barrymore. As a rule she disliked what she called "vulgar tunes," and such words as "Slap, bang," and "Such jolly dogs," were quite out of her line. But on this occasion, whether Miss Barrymore was conscious of feeling unusually "jolly," or whether she thought Mr. Hamilton ought to feel "jolly," or whether she felt morally certain that her grandfather, Sir Hildebrand, must feel extremely "jolly," and that, therefore, on any or all of these accounts it "became her" to play a thoroughly "jolly tune," we are not prepared to decide, though certain it is she played that most popular of all popular melodies, Vance's "Jolly Dogs," with a wonderful appreciation of the tune and of its wonderful appropriateness to "jolly feelings," and as

the very jolliest and most charmingly rollicking tune that had ever lingered in the ears of an admiring public.

But when Miss Barrymore had satisfied the "jolliness" of her feelings by rattling this tune for some little time, she desisted, and sitting down and analyzing her motives, she said,

"Ah! I know now why I have played the 'Three Jolly Dogs' with such gusto—because it is so unlike Mr. Hamilton. He is such a grand and stately 'dog,' that I conclude he would lose his respiration in amazement at my dreadful vulgarity if he were to hear me play it. Dear me! I feel the most intense longing to play it to him. I should so like to see him stare at me for presuming to insult *his* taste by such a *morceau*. At all events, *I* feel all the better for having given way to my feelings on this most unexpected occasion. I wonder if Mr. Hamilton ever gives way to *his* feelings?"

Miss Barrymore took up her work, and while using her tiny fingers very deftly—as most ladies do—in manufacturing something very pretty, the name of which is not recorded, she allowed her mind still to dwell upon Mr. Hamilton. She confessed to herself she was very unlearned in matters of etiquette, in spite of the excellent education she had had on this subject from Sir Hildebrand. She could not tell if it would be thought right that she should re-open the subject with her grandpapa, or if she ought to wait until he questioned her, but she decided on the latter.

"I declare I do think I will say I cannot—I cannot let Mr. Hamilton come here to know more of me. Only there is dear grandpapa, he will grieve!" She put down her work and leaned her head upon her hand.

"It is a positive truth that I feel half afraid of Mr. Hamilton; not that I felt afraid of him in the Park, but that was only because he was so certainly wrong, and I so decidedly right. I had then the courage to say or do anything; but now, with his 'angelic' ideas of women, and of their, as Raymond says, 'peerlessness,' &c., I am sure I feel that I am not half 'angelic' or 'peerless' enough. And then to fancy myself saying or doing something—unintentionally—wrong, and to have his large dark eyes looking down and rebuking me! I do not like my position at all—I do not like to look into the future; it does not seem happy."

She again leaned her head upon her hand, and, after a few moments of thought, said,

"If Mr. Hamilton really wishes to propitiate me—really wishes to make me think well of him, I advise him to sing the 'Three Jolly Dogs' from beginning to end; in my opinion it is a tune that would give me courage—if sung by him, that is—to reply to a very unexpected query."

But Miss Barrymore's reverie was interrupted. Sir Hildebrand had entered the library, and her duties called her there.

CHAPTER XXVI.

“ MISRECKONING IS NO PAYMENT.”

WE have omitted to record in its proper place that 'before Almeric Barrymore went abroad he found the lost key of his cabinet. Walking through the Park at Heraldstowe, he saw it lie glittering in the sun in a side path. To him it seemed but another of those strange mystifications with which he had been for some time surrounded. He himself felt morally assured that he had dropped the key in the streets of Stowe-in-the-Valley, and that thus again there had been some means, unknown to the work-a-day world—some means at hand to take up his key at one place and throw it down at another.

Almeric gazed for a few moments steadily round the Park, half expecting to see the *Sieur* Almeric step from some hiding-place into broad daylight. No. The red-start was singing loudly on the top of a high tree ; the little fly-catchers were enjoying themselves in their own peculiar fashion, without the accompaniment of song. The golden-crested wren flitted here and there, its crown glittering like burnished gold. Almeric watched it catch hold of the slender branch of a tree, and place itself, like the titmouse, with its back downwards. Almeric then walked on musingly, twisting the little key round and round between his fingers, and

wondering if he should or should not find the coin safe in his cabinet?

There was really no mystery whatever as regarded the key. Almeric himself had dropped it there, on his return from Stowe-in-the-Valley. True, he discovered the keys were loose in his pocket, and he took the precaution to count them, and found he had them all right. This was in the Park, and not in the streets of Stowe, as he now fancied; but he was unaware that he had afterwards dropped one when he took out his purse in the Park. On his return home on this particular morning, Almeric found the "six-angel piece" exactly where he had placed it. He sat for some time musing on all the strange events that had happened to him since he took the coin from his grandfather's cabinet. He did not, however, connect these events in any way with the coin, or fancy them sent as a sort of retributive justice, or to awaken him to the fact that the coin was not his. He had no wish to *take it* from his grandfather, beyond that originally stated when he first discovered the coin. He had never felt guilty, as he would if he had intended to commit an evil deed. He would willingly, even on this very morning, have related all the circumstances from beginning to end to his grandfather and sister, but the actual fact of the loss of the coin had been so widely circulated in the county of Z——, that to produce it would cause a hubbub of inquiries difficult to satisfy.

There had already been quite enough said about the "ghosts" at Heraldstowe, and though he himself could trust his own eyes, the count of Z—— would assuredly ridicule all he said on the subject of these relics of past ages. Almeric, therefore, left Heraldstowe at the mercy of the ghosts during his absence, and, as he acknowledged to Zara, very uncomfortable on her account; for, though he did not suspect his excellent ancestors of any wish to plague Sir Hildebrand, he did not think they would be over-scrupulous with his sister Zara. She, however, before he went away, had comforted him as best she could. She assured him that for his sake she felt "brave" enough to face ten thousand ghosts, and stare them out of countenance; but at the same time she inwardly resolved that she would never cross the entrance-hall alone after dark, if she could help it! And so eventually Almeric set off in pretty good spirits, and, as we have recorded, had the company of Mistress Nuala Maynooth and the Lady Grel Stuart in the early part of his journey.

But now he has been absent from home some two or three weeks; he had in a great measure recovered his health, and he is no longer worried by a dread of meeting his revered ancestor, Sir Almeric. Still he journeys on, from this place to that, until at length he hurries to reach such a place, because there he expects to meet letters from home.

Now, as we have seen, Miss Barrymore's time

and attention had been taken up in a way she least expected, and also entirely unthought of by Almeric. She therefore missed the post that would have given her brother news of Heraldstowe on the day he hurried forward to meet it; but if Miss Barrymore was too much bewildered to write to Almeric, Dr. Quinn was not. And the only letter Almeric received on this memorable morning was the following. After the usual courtesies of formal letter-writers, Almeric read, as may be supposed, with very much astonishment:

“And so you were right, after all, in the matter of the lost coin?—I forget the precise value of it, but I mean the coin that Sir Hildebrand conjectured had been carried off in the trimmings of Miss Thorn’s dress, and afterwards dropped in the Park. You were right, though so few were of your opinion at the time. You always said Miss Thorn had *not* carried it off: true—she had not. We have discovered ‘the thief.’ Sir Hildebrand is, as usual with him, very lenient, and probably will not appear against the man. He, Sir Hildebrand, was, I think, the most merciful judge on the bench; the bad ones must miss him sorely; I suspect Hamilton is rather more severe upon them; but are you not fully satisfied with your own penetration?—you must be, I am sure. Well, remember we have discovered ‘the thief,’ and as you were very much concerned for the loss of the coin, I conclude you will be very glad of such satisfactory news. Do not think we shall

‘hang the man’—I assure you Sir Hildebrand is most merciful,” &c., &c.

What could it all mean? Almeric read and re-read the letter, and still was puzzled to account for so extraordinary an announcement to him. Found *the thief*!—what did Dr. Quinn mean? He himself had the coin, it was true, but he had not stolen it; and how had they found the coin in his absence?—had he left his keys behind? No. There they were, all safe, the key of his cabinet amongst them. Had they, then, broken open his cabinet to get at the coin?—if they had, they had suspected him before he left home. *They*!—whom did he mean by *they*?—Sir Hildebrand and Zara? Monstrous as this seemed to Almeric, he could find no other solution to so strange a letter.

Now, it has been recorded that Almeric had not only no intention of stealing the coin, but that he never felt himself guilty of such a crime. He had not been able to recover the coin in the first moments of consternation at its loss, and this consternation had been followed up by such unusual circumstances that, simply to save himself from becoming a laughing-stock to the county of Z——, he had not produced the coin when it again fell into his hands. But now, with Dr. Quinn’s letter in his hand—with those terrible words under his eyes, burning, as it were, into his brain, he felt as if he had really stolen the coin. Large beads of moisture gathered on his brow,

and cursed each other down his cheeks, as he sat, with eyes distended, and respiration impeded, gazing upon the letter in his hand. He felt that he had been stigmatised by the epithet "thief." Motionless he sat for some time—the weight of this distracting news overpowered him.

When the first shock had passed, and he could call upon his intellect with more calmness, he rallied, and in proportion as he had at first felt "convicted" of theft, so now he indignantly spurned the idea.

"Before God and man, I am not a thief!" said he to himself; "but they have sullied my ancient name; they have degraded me to the level of vicious men; they have ignominiously branded me—me! an innocent man, and a gentleman. They! Oh! merciful God, save me, save me—save me from myself, for I feel as if my senses will desert me—that they, my grandfather and my sister, should thus tarnish the honourable name of Barrymore is beyond belief."

He covered his face with his hands, and again remained silent, but evidently convulsed with some overpowering emotion.

As we have shown in the earlier part of this chronicle, Almeric was very sensitive on all points of honour, and very chivalric in his notions. He could not understand the dastardly trickery, as it seemed to him, of first sending him away from home upon false pretences—for he was well enough in health—and then deliberately turning

over his property in his absence, and thus convicting him, from circumstantial evidence, of a great crime. And Dr. Quinn, of all people in the world—how durst he write to him upon such a subject, and brand him with the epithet of “thief!” Had Sir Hildebrand empowered him to do so?—Sir Hildebrand!—his kind old grandfather—had he wished that a stranger, comparatively speaking, should use such language to his grandson?

“If, instead of sending me away, grandpapa and Zara had told me of their—their—must I say suspicions? If they had, I could have explained all to them. And Zara is herself so well aware of some of the facts—or, rather, I could so easily bring them to her recollection, that they could have had no pretext for doubting me. Doubt!—the thought is too humbling!”

He knew he could recal every circumstance connected with the coin. The extraordinary freaks, changes of place—nay, the absolute loss, and afterwards, the recovery of it in a different place—all this he could recal and recount. He had not spoken of these uncommon occurrences, because he feared the ridicule of the county of Z——, who were not so learned in “ghosts,” and had not so many wonderful ancestors as the Barrymores had. And now, must he dread their scorn?—the thought was maddening. And it was the less able to be borne with patience, because in these days he could have no redress. There was the coin—the coin that had been a

subject of conversation to the county of Z—for several months—there was the coin lying cosily in a corner of his own cabinet. To explain now how it at length rested there would be too late. The absolute facts, to the truth of which he could swear—these positive facts would not be credited now—now that the coin was found in his possession, and he himself had never told anyone that he had it.

But, if these had been the days of chivalry, he would challenge the whole of the county of Z—to single combat! Man by man he would face them each in their turn, and wipe out with his own blood the only stain that had ever fallen on the name of Barrymore! Even duelling was out of date. If he knew whom he ought to challenge, and he did not. For Dr. Quinn—a hired brander of the innocent—was beneath his notice!

But still there remained the query, “What should he do?” Get away from Frankfort immediately—get away from all known haunts; take care not to let any one know his whereabouts; especially avoid the crowds of tourists, to be met with on certain routes. Where should he go? Yes, Dr. Quinn had sent him away from his lovely home, and the contemplative studies he so much enjoyed; and now he would keep away!

He did not reply to the letter immediately. He kept it about his person, like an evil genius, pulling it out to read at every trip and turn, and each time

becoming more determined never to return to Heraldstowe!

"Yes," said he to himself, as he stood and superintended the packing up of his belongings. "Yes, Zara said Baron Almeric did not alarm us by dropping his arm for nothing! Nor did the lights from the windows of the hall, of so many brilliant colours, rest upon the statues in the garden for nothing!

"We both knew, though we were so unwilling to acknowledge it to each other, and though we were both trying very hard not to believe in the 'Heraldstowe Ghosts.' Yet we both felt forewarned, that some heavy sorrow, some corroding care, or some great misfortune must fall upon the house of Barry-Barrymore. When the shades of our ancestors are disturbed by mundane affairs, we ought to prepare ourselves for the worst. I am sure I have tried to be sceptical, in spite of the persistence of Baron Almeric in dogging my footsteps, as he certainly did at one time. But sceptical or not, the sorrow is here. I will never return. There will be no heir to Heraldstowe, and the name of Barry-Barrymore will be gone from the earth! If people knew as much as I know on the subject of ghosts, they would be less sceptical!"

At Heraldstowe matters were tending towards a crisis. Miss Barrymore had not ventured to touch upon the subject that was always uppermost in her thoughts, and one whole day passed without a remark from Sir Hildebrand.

On the second day he was perhaps a little more talkative than usual during dinner; and when dinner was over he put his head back in his chair, and had a refreshing "forty winks," while Miss Barrymore sat wondering what answer she must eventually give to Mr. Hamilton!

When Sir Hildebrand awoke from his nap, he said,

"That drive to Prellsthorpe has been a little too much for me, Zara."

"Yes, so I perceive. Drink your wine, dear papa."

"This room is very dull, my dear, and I greatly dislike what I call 'owl-light.' We must have the room lighted before we sit down to dinner to-morrow."

"Certainly, dear papa, if you wish; but I thought you did not like to shut out summer."

"Nor do I," said he, rallying.

"I will ring," said she, rising.

"No, Zara, no, my darling. I have had as much wine as I wish, and—if you will allow me—I will go to the drawing-room with you."

"Oh!" thought Miss Barrymore, "so that is the reason dear papa does not like 'owl-light;' he wants to be with me! I can understand what that means." And Miss Barrymore sighed.

Sir Hildebrand usually had coffee carried to him in the dining-room; and it was also his custom to remain seated in that room till summoned to tea. Even when only Miss Barrymore and he were at home, this rule had never before been infringed.

Sir Hildebrand now leaned upon her arm, and they left the dining-room together. She placed him comfortably in his customary chair, and then rang for coffee. She observed he followed her—with his eyes—about the room, and she felt a little nervous as to what might happen next. Palmer entered with coffee, and she became more of her customary self.

Miss Barrymore tried to enter into conversation, but never came fewer subjects into her thoughts. She was conscious, that even her grandfather—usually so unobservant—was aware that her mind rambled from one thing to another, and that for the time being she had but little control over herself. She felt that some how or other Mr. Hamilton was a great trouble to her; she heartily wished he had waited a few months longer, before making these terrible proposals to her grandfather, and placing her in so uncomfortable a position. If Miss Barrymore had really disliked Mr. Hamilton, it would have been easy to say so; but she did not. In spite of the small fracas in the Park, she still honoured and esteemed Mr. Hamilton—perhaps, if she had taken the trouble to examine herself, more than any other gentleman.

It is true, that at this time there were no remains of any more tender feeling, to which Miss Barrymore had succumbed, at the time of the Heraldstowe fête. First, upon the principle that she ought not so greatly to admire—that is, admire to her own hurt—one who had already, as

it was said, devoted himself to another ; but above all, one who had never given her the smallest cause to think he preferred her to any other lady, had she tried to uproot this feeling. And next—Mr. Hamilton's incautious accusation of Almeric and Grel, had, for the time being, so lowered him in her estimation, and so excited her anger, that all traces of heartache had vanished, and Miss Barrymore felt she was herself again !

And thus—on her own account, and independent of a desire to please Sir Hildebrand—Miss Barrymore was unwilling to encourage Mr. Hamilton, because she knew she did not love him, and yet equally unwilling to decline his society, because she had the highest opinion of him, as a gentleman, a man of honour and of talent, and one whose position in the county of Z—— was all that could be desired. Halting between two opinions, Miss Barrymore was ill at ease. This was not—as she had discovered early in the evening—lost upon Sir Hildebrand.

When tea was removed, she said,

“Now I will sing to you, dear grandpapa.”

“Come to me, my darling,” said he ; “you are not happy ?”

“Indeed, you are mistaken,” said she with a little laugh, and an attempt to hide from him the trouble of her thoughts.

“But you are not at ease ? I see it, my dear.”

Sir Hildebrand, while watching Miss Barrymore, had gradually made up his own mind that

she had some serious objection to Mr. Hamilton, and that, out of love and deference to himself, she was trying to hide this, and make the best of the position—that is, sacrifice herself to please Sir Hildebrand. But Miss Barrymore, though she certainly did wish to gratify her grandfather, had really, as we have said, no absolute dislike to Mr. Hamilton; but then she could not honestly say she had a great preference for him! But still, willing to hide her own annoyance from Sir Hildebrand, she replied,

“And what young lady would be at ease whose mind was burdened with so tremendous a secret?” She seated herself on a low cushion by his side, and placed her hand upon his. He patted her head and looked lovingly upon her, and as she met his kind and yearning eyes, she resolved within herself that she would not disappoint *him*. She would not willingly ruffle one single grey hair, or cause him to heave one sigh on her account. She would accept Mr. Hamilton!

“I do not wish to hurry you, my dear, but I do not like to see you so ill at ease. What troubles you, my own darling? If you do not like him, tell me so.”

The gentle tones—the sort of resignation, as it seemed to her, in Sir Hildebrand’s manner, quite overpowered her; and to take at once all uneasy feeling from him, as well as really to utter her own sentiments, she said in as playful a manner as she could assume for the nonce,

"Not like Mr. Hamilton, papa! And I think I have had sufficient time for reflection——"

"God bless you, my darling," said he in joyous tones, and gently caressing her. "Yes, my dear, you may well say, 'Not like Mr. Hamilton!' I wonder what young lady would not be very glad, and, I may almost say, very proud, to be singled out from her compeers by Mr. Hamilton!" and again the old man caressed the young maiden, and she suffered him to enjoy the hope that all was right.

"And, then, you think you have made up your mind, my darling?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Yes, my dear, and—and your dear old grandfather thinks he can guess what sort of credentials he will have the happiness to take to Mr. Hamilton. Bless you, my darling!"

Miss Barrymore did not speak; the old man's hand was upon her head, and every now and then he raised her hand to his lips and saluted it lovingly.

"Will you allow him to have the *entrée* at Heraldstowe, and see you as often as the restrictions of society will permit?"

In very low tones she replied, "Yes, dear papa."

"Bless you, my Zara. And God will bless you, my love, for you have always been a good and dutiful child. And now, my love, such a husband! Could I find one superior in the whole world?—impossible!"

"Husband!" thought she. "But I do not feel

sure that I mean to let him marry me!" She remained silent, and Sir Hildebrand was unaware of this flaw in the engagement.

"But, my dear, as I said before, this is only a permission, with an understanding to boot, to visit here and make the most of the opportunities that offer for knowing more of you. There will be no 'announcement' to the county, for there is nothing to announce. This leaves the future free, to be acted upon as you and he shall desire; you quite understand, my dear?"

"Yes, thank you, dear kind papa." And Miss Barrymore arose from her low seat and put her arms round the old man's neck, and lovingly kissed his forehead.

And then the old man would not have chess, his mind was too full of thought; nor music, because he liked to have his darling sit by his side; he liked to talk to his child. And so they finished the evening.

N O T E S.

NOTE 1.—“In the tree to which we moored our boat lived two tiny striped squirrels, not larger than a common mouse, who watched our proceedings all day with the greatest curiosity.”—“*Adventures among the Dyaks of Borneo*,” by Frederick Boyle, F.R.G.S.

NOTE 2.—“We saw also a remarkable specimen of a large squirrel peculiar to Bidi; it had a brown grey body and a scarlet stripe from nose to tail.”—*Ibid.*

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.







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